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SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

EVANGELICAL, DEVOTIONAL AND PRACTICAL.

ADAPTED TO THE PROMOTION OF

CHRISTIAN PIETY, FAMILY RELIGION, AND YOUTHFUL VIRTUE.

By JOSEPH LATHROP, D. D.
PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN WESTSPRINGFIELD.

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

VOLUME II

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CONTENTS.

SERMON I.
Christ's Miracles recorded that Men might believe.

SERMON II.
Credibility and Importance of the Gospel Report.

SERMON III.
The Guilt and Danger of Unbelief.

SERMON IV.
Pilate's Indifference to the Truth.

SERMON V.
Guilt of those who strengthen the Wicked.

SERMON VI.
Destruction of those who despise the Gospel.

SERMON VII.
The subject of Sermon VII, continued.

SERMON VIII.
Cure and Conversion of Naaman the Syrian Leper.

SERMON IX.
The First Fruits unto Christ.

SERMON X.
The Uncertainty of the Way of the Wicked.

SERMON XI.
A Paralytic healed on the Faith of others.

SERMON XII.
The Vial poured into the Sun considered in accommodation to the Present Times.

SERMON XIII.
Religion essential in the Love of our Country.

SERMON XIV.
The influence of Religion to enlarge the Mind.

SERMON XV.
The changing Nature of Worldly Things.

SERMON XVI.
The infamous Character of the Churl.

SERMON XVII.
Different Effects of a similar Education illustrated.

SERMON XVIII.
The Dovelike Descent of the Spirit on Christ.

SERMON XIX.
The subject of Sermon XVIII, improved.

SERMON XX.
Parting with Friends a painful Trial.

SERMON XXI.
Thankfulness to God for his daily Benefits.

SERMON XXII.
Christian characterized, who has been with Jesus.

SERMON XXIII.
The Impotent Man at the Pool of Bethesda.

SERMON XXIV.
Awakened Jailer instructed in the way to Salvation.

SERMON XXV.
Micah's Confidence and Disappointment.

SERMON XXVI.
Premature Judging forbidden.

SERMON XXVII.
The Excellence of the Scriptures.

SERMON XXVIII.
On the Perspicuity of the Scriptures.

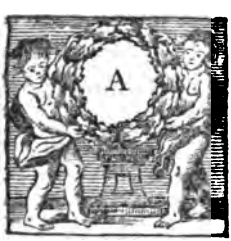
SERMON XXIX.
The Soul rejoicing in deliverance from Prison.

SERMON I.

Christ's Miracles recorded, that Men might believe.

JOHN, xx. 30, 31.

And many other signs truly did Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.



AS God has made us rational creatures, the religion which he requires of us must be a rational service. Faith, which is the great principle of religion, must be founded in evidence. Reason, in the fallen state of our nature, could never discover all the things necessary for us to know. It could never investigate the way in which, and the terms on which, sinners may regain the lost favour of God. For our knowledge of these things we must be indebted to revelation.

To judge of the evidence, by which the truth of revelation is proved, must be the province of reason. God never requires us to believe any thing proposed

to us, without competent evidence of its truth. Whenever he sends to men a revelation of his will, he sends it accompanied with demonstration of its divine original.

The gospel revelation came to the world in this manner:—It began to be spoken by the Son of God himself, and was confirmed by them who heard him. The disciples, whom he chose for his attendants were witnesses of his doctrines and works: And they not only related them to others in that age, but have left a written narrative for the benefit of succeeding ages; and this narrative is handed down to us.

The Apostle John, having given a summary history of Christ's works, subjoins this general observation; "Many other signs did Jesus, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe him to be the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name."

I. It is here supposed, that the miracles performed by Jesus Christ, were a sufficient evidence of his divine authority.

Miracles, which are effects produced above the common powers of nature, and in a way and manner different from its ordinary and stated course, plainly discover God's immediate interposition. And from the goodness and faithfulness of God we may certainly conclude, that he never will immediately and supernaturally interpose to give such credibility to a falsehood, that men, judging rationally, must receive it as a truth. It was therefore a just conclusion of Nicodemus, that Jesus must be a teacher come from God, because no man could do the miracles which he did, except God were with him.

The miracles of Christ were great and numerous. He constantly appealed to them as divine seals of his mission, and on them he placed the credit of all

his doctrines. To suppose that God, in such a case, should enable an impostor to perform these stupendous works, or should perform them for him, is contrary to all our ideas of his moral character. All moral evidence depends on the veracity of God. They who saw Christ cast out devils, heal the sick, raise the dead, still the tempests, only by a single word; and afterward yield himself to death; and then, exactly according to his prediction, rise from the dead, ascend into heaven, and shed down on his disciples the promised gifts of the spirit; could not rationally doubt, that he was, what he declared himself to be, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world; and that, consequently, all his doctrines were true, his precepts pure, and his whole religion a heavenly institution.

II. As these signs were evidence to those who *saw* them, so the *record* given of them is evidence to *succeeding* ages. This the evangelist teaches us, when he says, "These signs are written that ye might believe." For if they could be evidence only to those who saw them, there was no reason why they should be written; nor would the writing of them be a mean of faith.

The apostle observes, that Christ performed them in the presence of *his disciples*. Most of them indeed, were wrought in the presence of multitudes: But as the disciples were to be witnesses of them to the world, the evangelist particularly mentions this circumstance, to give credibility to their testimony. That which they saw and heard, they declared to others. They did not relate Christ's miracles on fame or report, but from their own immediate knowledge. They testified that which they saw, and their testimony is worthy of belief.

The disciples of Jesus were credible witnesses of the facts which they related; because it was not possible that they should be deceived; they could

be under no possible temptation to deceive others; nor was it in their power to have deceived mankind, even if they had formed such a design.

1. They could not be mistaken themselves in the matters, which they relate, but must infallibly know whether they were true or not.

The miracles, which they have recorded, were matters which fell under their own observation, and were subject to their own senses. Whether they saw the dead rise; the sick and lame healed; storms composed; thousands fed with a few loaves; and, besure, whether they were themselves able to work miracles and speak with divers tongues; whether Jesus, who was crucified, actually rose and appeared to them; whether they conversed with him, saw his wounds, and heard him communicate his instructions to them; were facts in which they could not possibly be mistaken. If their senses, in such plain, obvious matters, could deceive them, we cannot trust our senses in any case. If their relation of facts is not true, they must have aimed to deceive mankind. But,

2. They could be under no temptation to relate these things, if they had not known them to be true, because, by their testimony, they exposed themselves to the loss of every thing that is desirable, and to the suffering of every thing that is terrible, in this world. Poverty, reproach, persecution and death, were the consequences of their perseverance in their testimony, and consequences which they foresaw, and which Christ had warned them to expect. And it can never be imagined that a number of men, in cool blood, should combine together to sacrifice every thing that is dear in life, for the sake of imposing a falsehood on the world—should all steadily persevere in this design, after they began to feel the consequences of it, and should even persist in it till death, and none among them

should desert the cause and discover the fraud. Such a combination, so executed, was never known, or heard of, nor is human nature capable of it. And,

3. If they had been disposed to deceive mankind in these facts, it was not in their power to do it, nor could it be in their thoughts to attempt it. The facts which they relate, and the doctrines which they deliver, are so great and wonderful, that it is absurd to suppose a number of men should frame them out of their own invention. Had not the things which they declare been true, they could not have maintained that uniformity and consistency which appear in their testimony: Much less could such a number of persons have been consistent with one another. And if their testimony had not been true, it was, in the time of it, easy to detect the fraud and prevent it from spreading. The facts which they relate they declared were done publickly; in the view of the world; and then very lately. And had there been no such miracles, there would have been no credit given to their report. The disciples had enemies who wished to confound them. The Jews, especially their rulers, spared no pains to suppress the christian cause. Their enmity to it would have prompted them to convict the disciples of falsehood, if they had not known, that the facts related were indisputable. Had they discovered any imposture, they would immediately have made it publick. And since they never denied the facts asserted by the apostles, but rather denied the consequences of them, they must undoubtedly have been convinced, that they were real, and not fictitious.

Had not the miracles, said to have been wrought by Jesus and his disciples, been real, the gospel never could have gained so extensive credit, as in fact it did; and if it had not been then received, it would have been more difficult to introduce it, and give it a spread afterward: For it is always more

easy to establish a scheme when it is new, than to revive it, after it has been rejected and proved to be false.

The sacred writings carry in them an air of honesty and impartiality. They are of a holy nature and beneficial tendency. The pious and exemplary lives of the apostles proved them to be under the influence of the religion which they taught; and their dying in defence of it shewed, that they firmly believed it to be divine. Its wonderful success, without the support of human power, demonstrates, that it was patronized by heaven. The gospel history comes down to us with the passport of all former ages, and with every circumstance of credibility that can possibly attend any history.

There are four men, who have professedly written memoirs of the life of Jesus Christ. Two of them were his attendant disciples; the other two were contemporary and conversant with his disciples. Four others have written epistles to particular societies of christians, or to christians in general. In these epistles they recognise the character, assert or allude to the miracles, and teach the doctrines of Jesus, as they are related in those memoirs. So that this history stands on the credit of eight different persons, most of whom were the immediate disciples of Jesus, and all of them his contemporaries. They wrote separately, on different occasions, without the least appearance of concert or collusion; and yet all substantially agree. To some of the principal facts there is the concurrent testimony of heathen writers. These memoirs and epistles were received as genuine, in the apostolick and next succeeding age, and from age to age down to the present time. In short the gospel history, if considered merely as human, is better authenticated than any other ancient history extant. If we doubt its truth, we must doubt the truth of

all history, and believe nothing, but what we see with our own eyes. I proceed to observe,

III. Though the evangelists have not written every thing which Christ did and taught, yet, they have written as much as is necessary to the establishment of our faith. Saint John says, *Many other things truly did Jesus, which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe.* He says afterward, *There are many other things which Jesus did, which, if they should be written, every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.* A particular narrative of every thing which Christ did and spake, would have swelled the sacred volume beyond bounds. Few or none would have found ability to procure it, or time to read it. So that it would have been much less useful to the world, than the concise, summary account which is now given us. They who can reject the gospel, after all the evidence which arises from the miracles written, might as well reject it, if the number were ten times as great. And though every *discourse* which our Saviour delivered is not given us at full length, yet we have a summary view of all the *doctrines* which he taught. Though many things which he spake are omitted in the history, yet no essential and important truth is suppressed.

The observation here made, may be applied to the works and sermons of his apostles. It is not necessary to suppose, nor indeed is it probable, that the New Testament contains all their transactions. It is certain that we have only a summary account of the sermons which they preached; and, in some instances, there is only mention made of their preaching at such a place, without any particular detail of the matters on which they spake. Nor is the supposition unreasonable,

that they might write many epistles, on one occasion and another, which, are not transmitted to us. But then we have, in the sacred volume, all the *doctrines* fully taught, which we could have had, if every sermon preached, and every letter written by the apostles, had been given us at full length. As they wrote to different churches, they would undoubtedly write many of the same things repeatedly. We find this to be in some measure the case with many of the epistles which we have. There is a great similarity between that to the Ephesians, and that to the Colossians. There is almost no sentiment in the one but what occurs in the other, and often in nearly the same expressions. The epistle to Titus contains little, but what we find in those to Timothy. There is a great resemblance between Jude's epistle, and part of the second epistle of Peter.

A repetition of the same things, especially of the more important truths and duties of religion, is of great use. It helps us to a better understanding of them; it tends to impress them on the mind; it serves to fix them in the memory; it shews what the inspired writers esteemed the most weighty matters, and were most solicitous to inculcate. It is attended also with another important advantage. It secures the scriptures from the possibility of material corruption. If the religion of the gospel had been written systematically; and the same doctrine, or precept, had been only once expressed; evil minded men, by altering a single passage, would have erased an essential point, and changed the substance of the system. But now, as the same things are interspersed in various parts, the corruption of a single text, will affect none of the great truths of religion, because the truth contained in the text so corrupted, is to be found elsewhere. In order to blot out any of the doctrines

of religion, the scriptures must be altered in so many places at once, that every reader would immediately observe and reject the corruption. From this one circumstance, we may be absolutely certain, that the sacred scriptures have never suffered any material or essential alterations, either from the carelessness of transcribers, or the artifice of impostors.

But though it seems necessary, that there should be frequent repetitions of the same things, yet it is by no means necessary, that every thing which Christ did and spake, or which the apostles preached and wrote, should be conveyed to us; for so many things could not be contained within the compass of a volume adapted to common use.

From the miracles recorded, we have all the evidence of the divine authority of the scriptures, which we could have from a thousand more. And from the writings transmitted to us, we have all the instructions concerning our faith and duty, that we should have had, if every sermon delivered by Christ and his apostles, and all the letters which the apostles wrote, had been conveyed to us at large. For as the sermons were delivered, and the letters were written to different persons, at different times, they were doubtless in substance similar to those which we now possess: So that the scriptures are perfect, and fully adapted to their end, though, in the days of inspiration and miracles, many things were spoken and done, which are not contained in this book.

What was the great end for which the scriptures were written, the apostle teaches us;

IV. In the fourth place. *These things are written that ye might believe.*

Faith is the great principle of religion. The scriptures teach us, what is that evidence on which their divine authority is founded, and point out

to us the great truths which are to govern our practice.

The Christian needs to go no farther, than to the Bible itself, to find evidence of its divinity. If we only receive it with the regard due to common history, we must believe, that there were such persons as Jesus and his apostles, and that they performed very wonderful works. If they performed such works, they were sent of God; and if they were sent of God, the doctrines which they taught are to be believed; and the rules of life, which they gave, are to be obeyed. The purity, harmony, benevolent design and useful tendency of these doctrines and precepts, afford additional evidence for the confirmation of our faith.

The faith of a Christian must not stop in a rational conviction of the divine authority of the scriptures; nor in a just apprehension of the sense and meaning of them. It must go farther. It must regard the system of religion there taught, as excellent and important; and yield a full and unreserved consent to it. That only is true faith, which has a practical influence. The apostle says to the Thessalonians, "The word, which ye heard of us, ye received, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh in you which believe." He commends them "for their work of faith and their labour of love." That is faith, which gives the doctrines of the gospel their proper operation on the heart and life. If we acknowledge the gospel to be true, on a rational conviction of the sufficiency of its evidence, and yet treat it as if it were false; if we own Christ as a Saviour, and yet make no application to him, and place no dependence on him for salvation; if we profess the doctrines which he has taught, and yet are wholly uninfluenced by them in our conduct; if we commend his precepts

so excellent, and yet live in opposition to them; our faith is only speculation, and our speculative faith is practical unbelief. But if we so receive the gospel, that it effectually works in us, casts down imaginations, and every high thing which exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; then our faith is such as the gospel requires.

If the gospel is true, it must be infinitely important. To receive it with indifference, is to treat it with contempt. To despise it is to expose ourselves to that wonderful destruction, which it reveals from heaven against them who hold the truth in unrighteousness. If to disbelieve the gospel against all the evidence which attends it, discovers perverseness of heart; what stupidity, what obstinacy, what madness do they discover, who profess to believe it, and yet live in direct opposition to it!

It is only the influential, the practical faith, which is worthy of the name.

This brings us to observe,

V. That to this faith is annexed eternal life. "These things are written, that ye might believe, and that believing ye might have life through Christ's name."

The gospel considers mankind as a guilty race, under condemnation to everlasting death. To redeem them from death, and bring them to the hope of immortality here, and the enjoyment of it hereafter, was the great end for which Christ appeared on earth. To accomplish this design, he not only lived among men, wrought miracles, and went about teaching, and doing good; but suffered death, revived, and entered into glory. Eternal life, therefore, comes to us in his name; and our faith and hope must regard him in the character of

a Saivour and Redeemer. If we have life through his name, our faith must be in his name. The apostle Peter says, "We are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, who was ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifested in these last times for us, who by him do believe in God that raised him from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God."

Faith entitles us to eternal life. "Believing we have life through his name." But the faith to which this mighty privilege is annexed, is such as we have already described; a faith which effectually works in us. To no other faith do we find the promise of life made. To know, therefore, whether we have life through the name of Christ, we must inquire, whether we have purified our hearts by obeying the truth; whether the spirit and temper of the gospel is formed in us; whether we are created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has ordained that we should walk in them.

IMPROVEMENT.

How wonderful is the grace of God, in making such preparation for our faith and happiness! A Saviour has been sent from heaven, the most stupendous miracles have been wrought, the most sublime and glorious doctrines have been delivered, these have been written, the writings have been preserved and conveyed to us, that we might believe, and that believing, we might have eternal life. How great is the perverseness of men, that they should need such mighty efforts of divine power to bring them to believe! How amazing is the perverseness of those who remain in unbelief and disobedience against all these efforts of God's grace and power! How just will be the condemnation of those, who will not, by all the means used with

them, and by all the advantages bestowed on them, be brought to believe in Christ's name, and accept the glorious life, which he has purchased for them, and revealed to them! It is said of some, that Christ himself marvelled because of their unbelief. And marvellous it is, that sinners should need so much done for them to overcome their unbelief and enmity; and that so many should continue unbelieving and impenitent after all that is done.

God has written to us the great things of his grace; he has sent to us the word of salvation. Let us beware, lest this be our condemnation, that life is offered us, and we have chosen death; and light has come to us, and we have loved darkness.

SERMON II.

The Credibility and Importance of the Gospel Report.

ISAIAH, liii. 1.

Who hath believed our report?

THIS chapter contains a prophetick description of the sufferings of Jesus Christ, of the gracious purposes of his death, and of the contempt and opposition which should attend him in the course of his ministry.

The words of our text are a complaint of the incredulity of those, to whom his gospel should be preached by himself in his own person, and by his apostle after him.

The words are by saint John applied to those, who, when they saw Christ's miracles, would not receive him as the promised Saviour. "Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him; that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, Lord, Who hath believ-

ed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" The apostle Paul, speaking of the perverseness of the Jews under *his* preaching, and that of the other apostles, says, in the words of Isaiah, "How beautiful are the feet of them, who preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel; for the same prophet says, Lord, Who hath believed our report?"

The report here intended is the gospel. The complaint is, that few believe it. And this complaint is made by those, who preached in the most engaging manner, and with the highest tokens of their divine commission.

The text is not a lamentation over those who had never heard the gospel, but a reprehension of those who had heard, and yet would not believe. The prophet speaking of the Messiah, whom he calls God's servant, says, "He shall deal prudently, he shall sprinkle many nations, that which had not been told them, they shall see; and that which they had not heard, shall they consider." But he adds, "Who hath believed our report?" John applies the prophecy as fulfilled in those who had actually seen Christ's miracles. Paul, in like manner, applies it to those, who had seen the feet of the messengers, who brought glad tidings.

We will contemplate the gospel under this idea, that is, a *Report*. And then we will consider the complaint: *Who hath believed it?*

I. We will contemplate this report, and inquire whether it is not worthy of our attention and belief.

1. The report, which we hear, is a most *instructive* report.

It brings us information of many things, which were before unknown, and which, without this information, never could have been known to the sons of men. "That which had not been told us, we

see." The gospel, for this reason, is called a message, good tidings, and tidings of great joy.

The leading truths of natural religion, as the existence and providence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the obligations to virtue, are agreeable to the dictates of reason; and perhaps might be, in some measure, discovered without revelation. At least they were known among those, who had never enjoyed a *written* revelation, though, indeed, we cannot say, how far these might be indebted to traditional information. But certainly those truths, which immediately relate to the recovery and salvation of sinners, human reason could never investigate. Whether the guilty can be pardoned, or, if there is pardon for them, in what way it will be granted, and on what terms it may be obtained, whether they may hope for God's assistance in complying with these terms, whether forgiveness will be repeated after new offences, whether there will be a resurrection of the body, and what is the nature of the life to come? These are questions to which reason can return no satisfactory answer. Our knowledge in these interesting matters comes by the report of the gospel. And these are some of its principal subjects.

This leads me to say,

2. The gospel is a report *from heaven.*

Jesus the son of God, and his inspired apostles, call it *their* report.

We often hear rumours, of one kind and another, of which we know not the original. Their sound, like that of the winds, strikes our ears, but we know not whence it comes, nor whither it goes. If we attempt to trace them, we cannot find the author or occasion. Before they have gone far, they appear to be substantially changed. And yet these precarious reports meet with many who will readily believe them, eagerly take them up, and industriously hand them round.

The report, which we have heard, is not like these. We know whence it is. It originated in heaven, and from thence is sent down to us. The apostle commends the Thessalonians, that when they heard the gospel preached, "they received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God." He warns the Hebrews, that they refuse not him, who speaketh; for says he, "if they escaped not, who refused him that spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him, that speaketh from heaven."—"How shall we escape, if we neglect this great salvation, which, at the first, began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by them who heard him?"

The gospel was, in some degree, made known to the patriarchs; and afterwards more fully to the prophets. But "God, who, at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake to the fathers by the prophets, has, in these last days, spoken to us by his son." The knowledge communicated to the fathers was from heaven; for "holy men of God spake, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." But the gospel revelation is, in a more eminent sense, from heaven, as it was spoken to men immediately by the mouth of a divine instructor. And his instructions have come to us, not as most other reports come, by uncertain traditionary conveyance from one to another; but in a way far more sure and satisfactory, by authentic records. This divine teacher chose a number of disciples, who attended upon him, during his abode on earth, and received his doctrines immediately from his mouth. These doctrines they, in his name, preached to the world, for the benefit of that age; and committed to writing, for the use of succeeding ages. The report comes to us, not as a doubtful hearsay, but as a faithful record.

Whatever evidence we might have, that the Son of God once appeared on earth, yet if we had no information concerning his doctrines, but what came by traditionary report, we must receive it with great diffidence; for, in passing through a succession of many generations, it might be materially altered. Tradition, in the early ages of the world, when human life was extended to almost a thousand years, was a much safer mode of conveyance, than it can be now, since the great reduction of our mortal term. The great doctrines of revelation are not left in the precarious hands of tradition. Soon after Christ's ascension, they were, by his attendants, committed to writing. And copies of their writings were, in a short time, so multiplied and dispersed, as to stand secure against any attempts to corrupt them. Had the sacred records been altered, while the writers were alive, they would have detected and remedied the evil. By the time that they were gone off the stage, the copies were too numerous to admit of an alteration, which should be common to them all. If only a few copies had been mutilated and corrupted, these, by comparing them with other copies, might have been corrected. To introduce into them all, at the same time, any great and essential alterations, must have been so evidently impracticable, that we cannot suppose it would ever be attempted. If then the gospel was, at first, a report from heaven, we are still to regard it as such; for it has been conveyed to us in a way which secures it from all reasonable suspicion or essential corruption.

We may therefore add,

3. The gospel is a *credible* report.

Many reports come to us without evidence, we only hear them; but know not what is their foundation, or whether they have any. And yet even these reports pass not wholly unregarded.

How readily do we give credit and circulation to ill reports concerning our neighbours?—How easily are we alarmed at threatening reports concerning our persons and properties?—How fondly do we embrace favourable reports concerning our particular friends? Such rumours as these we often believe, without waiting to examine their evidence or credibility. But if any important intelligence is brought to us, which is both rational in itself, and, at the same time, supported by a competent number of reputable witnesses, we may much rather judge it worthy of our attention and belief.

With this evidence the gospel comes.

It is credible in its own nature. It gives us the most noble and exalted ideas of the perfections and providence of God. It lays before us a system of moral duties fully corresponding with the divine character. That we should love God with all our hearts, and our neighbours as ourselves—that we should relieve the miseries, and promote the happiness of others, as we have opportunity—that we should govern our passions and restrain our appetites—that we should use the good things of the world without abusing them, are duties which the gospel inculcates and reason approves.

The doctrines of the gospel, though beyond the discovery, and above the comprehension of reason, are, in no instance, contrary to its dictates. They are all adapted to promote real virtue and righteousness. The immortality of the soul; the resurrection of the body, a future judgment, and the equitable distribution of rewards and punishments, are motives of solemn importance, urging us to repentance of sin, and holiness of life. The discovery of God's mercy to forgive the penitent, and of his grace to assist the humble, is adapted to raise our drooping hopes, and animate us against all the difficulties, which may attend us in a course

of religion. The benevolent design, and holy tendency of the gospel, in all its doctrines and precepts, render it worthy of our belief and acceptance.

Besides this internal evidence, God has been pleased to give it the sanction of his own testimony.

The miracles, which Jesus performed, were, to his first disciples, a complete demonstration of the truth of his doctrines. The history of his life, miracles, death and resurrection, delivered on the testimony of these disciples, is to us a sufficient evidence of the same. For, as they conversed with him, and saw and heard the things which they relate, they could not themselves be deceived. The innocence and integrity of their lives, and their self-denials and sufferings in their master's cause, secure them from the suspicion of a design to deceive others. The numerous adversaries to the Christian cause among the learned men and rulers of the Jews and Gentiles, rendered it impossible, that these disciples, had they been ever so crafty and dishonest, should impose a fraud on the world. They confirmed their testimony and doctrines by miracles performed in their master's name. They appeared to live and act under the influence of their own doctrines; and thus gave practical evidence of their sincerity in preaching them. They resigned every worldly interest in support of the sacred cause, in which they were engaged; and thus made it manifest to all, that the motives which governed them were not the interests and honours of this world; but a belief of, and regard to that solemn futurity, which they, with such confidence, proclaimed to mankind.

In consequence of their preaching, the gospel gained footing, and spread to a great extent in the world; which it never could have done, if the facts alledged by them, had been only fictions of

their own heads. If there never had been such a man as Jesus of Nazareth, who publickly preached, and wrought miracles in Judea; who was tried and condemned by the Jewish council, and sentenced to crucifixion by the Roman governor, and who, within three days after his death and burial, rose again and appeared to many; a few men, combined together, could never, by any artifice or contrivance, have persuaded the world to believe these things; because the contrary must have been universally known. That christianity did gain credit, and spread in the world, and has, for several ages continued, even down to this time, we all know. This fact is an undeniable evidence of its truth and divinity. For it did not take place and prevail, either by secret fraud or open force, as impostures usually have done; but by the testimony of a few men to plain matters of fact, to which they appeal as well known, and which, had they not been real, could easily have been disproved.

Errors have sometimes been introduced and propagated by the artful reasoning of interested men. But christianity rests not on the basis of human reasoning, or a subtile, intricate train of argumentation: It stands on the ground of plain facts, of which every man is able to judge. The life, miracles, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth are the facts which support it. If these did really take place, the gospel is true. Whether they did or not, men of common abilities were as competent to judge, as men of the profoundest learning.

We, who live in the present age, have not, in every respect, the same evidence of the truth of the gospel, as they had, who were eye witnesses of those facts. But we have their testimony, in the most authentick manner, conveyed to us. Some advantages we have, which they had not. We

have the examination of preceding ages. We see christianity still supporting itself against all the opposition of the world. We see the unwearied attempts of its enemies to subvert it, rendered fruitless and vain. We see many of the predictions, contained in these records, already verified; and others, to all appearance, hastening on toward an accomplishment. These things amount to a full proof that the gospel is divine. We are to regard it then as a credible report.

4. It is an *interesting* report.

Those reports, which, in our social interviews, are the more usual topics of discourse, are, in comparison with this, of small importance. Some of them relate to peace and war; the success and defeat of armies; the policies of kingdoms; and the progress of arts and commerce. Some of them respect the affairs of families; the conduct of particular persons; contentions and lawsuits between neighbours; the folly of one man, and the wisdom of another. Many of them are altogether trifling, and introduced to supply the want of thought, and fill up the vacuities of conversation. But the report, which we have from heaven, is infinitely important and equally concerns every son of Adam. If other reports engage the attention of some, this demands the regard of all.

From the gospel we learn, that the human race have, by transgression, fallen under the divine displeasure. This report corresponds with our own experience and observation. We see death reigning over the sons of men. That death entered into the world by sin, is a reasonable supposition; and it is an express doctrine of revelation. Death is not all that the sinner has to fear. Conscience apprehends something more awful than this; and the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. These are

alarming reports. Whether there be any remedy for our unhappy condition; how we shall obtain deliverance from the wrath to come, are serious and important inquiries.

The gospel brings us a joyful message. It proclaims peace and good will to men. It discovers a sacrifice offered for our sins by Jesus the Son of God, who was manifested in human flesh. It assures us that God is in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses. Pardon here, and glory in heaven, it promises without distinction, to all who repent, and do works meet for repentance.

How interesting are these reports? Our existence here is short. All our worldly possessions and prospects we must soon resign. Shall we have nothing in exchange? To think that our existence terminates with death, is shocking to nature. To look for a miserable existence beyond death is more tremendous still. How joyful then is the information, that there is before us an existence, which will be lasting without end, and may also be happy beyond conception, that the most guilty may be pardoned, and the most unworthy may obtain a blessed immortality.

In other cases, we readily receive a report which favours our interest, and corresponds with our wishes. We easily believe an ill report of an enemy, or a good report of a friend. We eagerly attend advice which agrees with our previous resolutions; and we, with little suspicion embrace, as our friend, the man who promises to serve our interest. The gospel report is then most worthy of our acceptance. This shews us how we may be great and happy! It points out to us our real interest, and instructs us how we may secure it.

5. This is a *publick* report. It is what we have all heard, and heard often.

Some reports are cautiously whispered from one friend and confident to another. However interesting they may be, there are many, who have no opportunity to take the benefit of them. If there is a report of great profits to be made by a particular article of commerce, of a great demand for some of the necessaries of life in a certain place, of a great scarcity of some useful commodity likely to happen soon; they who first hear this report, will keep it to themselves; or communicate it only to a few select friends, who may assist them in the monopoly.

But the report, of which we are now speaking, is common. All have the same opportunity to make use of it. None can say, they have never heard it. "The sound has gone forth into all the earth;" as the apostle observes; "and the word to the ends of the world."

If we fail of those blessings, which the gospel offers, we cannot plead in our excuse, that the report of them never had reached us; or that others had first engrossed them. They are published and proposed to all. How many soever have obtained a share in them, enough still remains for us. The report is, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price."—"Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely."

Finally, this is an *ancient* report. It was made ages ago. Our fathers heard it, and have told it to us: We heard it in our childhood; and hear it still. It is often repeated in our ears, and importunately urged on our consciences. If we despise it, soon will be verified that part, which we are most reluctant to hear; "He who believeth not, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

"Men and brethren, and whosoever among you feareth God, unto you, unto you is the word of this salvation sent."——Through Jesus Christ is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all who believe are justified from all things from which ye cannot be justified by the law of nature, nor could the Jews be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish." For saith the Almighty, "I work a work in your days, a work which ye will in no wise believe, though a man declare it to you."

The guilt and danger of unbelief will be more fully represented in another discourse.

SERMON III.

The Guilt and Danger of Unbelief.

ISAIAH, liii. 1.

Who hath believed our report?

THESE words are a prophetick complaint of the incredulity and disobedience of those, to whom the gospel should be preached by Jesus in person, and by his disciples after him.

We have already considered, what kind of report the gospel is.—We have seen, that, in every view, it is worthy of our most serious regard.

Let us now,

II. Consider, whether a proper attention is paid to this report among those to whom it is sent, or who have an opportunity to hear it.

The complaint in the text is, "Who hath believed our report?"

The prophet speaks in the person of Jesus Christ, and his apostles. He foretells, that under their ministry, there would be many unbelievers: And so the event has proved.

As it was in their day, so it has been since.

The gospel, which to some is a savour of life unto life, is to others a savour of death unto death.

There are many *nations*, which have not believed the report.

The words of the Psalmist, concerning the works of nature, Saint Paul applies to the preachers of the gospel.—"Their sound is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard."

The commission which Christ gave to his apostles was, that they should preach the gospel *to all nations*. This commission they executed with fidelity. They travelled into various parts of the world. Many nations they personally visited. Wherever they went, they preached in places of publick resort. And where they found a competent number of believers, they planted churches; and in every church they ordained stated elders. To the churches which they had planted they wrote many letters, which were publickly read, as well in other churches as in those to which they were immediately directed. They performed miracles in the presence of multitudes, and in the most conspicuous manner. The doors of the houses, in which they preached, were opened to all, to heathens and unbelievers, as well as to christians. And they, as occasion required, spake in all the various languages of the people who assembled to hear them. They might therefore properly be said to preach the gospel to *all nations*. Many, from all the nations comprehended within the Roman empire, heard their doctrines and saw their miracles; and these would naturally carry to others information of the things which they had seen and heard. Probably there were few or none within the empire, but who, in the apostle's time, either heard the gospel, or heard such report concerning it, as

ought to have awakened their attention to it. The intercourse of the Romans with other nations could not fail to convey the report beyond the bounds of the empire. Nor was the ministry of the apostles, and the primitive preachers confined within these limits. Their labours occupied a larger sphere. The work which they began, was, in the next age, still pursued, and carried to a wider extent. In short, it may be doubted, whether there is any nation in the world, which has not at one time or another had the offer of the gospel. If it has not been actually preached among them, yet the knowledge of it has been conveyed to them in such a measure, as might justly have led them to enquire into its nature and evidence. The true reason why they have it not, is their indifference to it when they hear it, and their rejection of it when it is offered.

If there were, among mankind, the same attention to the concerns of religion, as there is to the interest of the present world, the gospel, before this time, would have overspread the earth. The valuable arts and manufactures of one country are soon introduced into all commercial countries, and from thence conveyed to places more obscure. The produce and works of China and the Indias are circulated through Europe, and all the civilized parts of America: And many of them are not unknown even among the savages of America, and the barbarians of Africa. If a useful or curious discovery is made in one nation, it soon is communicated to others. The use of the loadstone and the compass, of gunpowder and firearms did not long rest with the first inventors. If mankind felt the same solicitude to improve in virtue and goodness, as to increase in wealth and power—the same concern to spread the knowledge of religion, as to promote arts, manufactures and com-

merce, christianity had long since been the religion of the world. But such is their stupidity with regard to their most important interests, that it is still confined to much the smaller part of our fallen race.

Among those, to whom the gospel is preached, there are many, who avowedly reject it; and of those who profess to believe it, there are many, who in works deny it.

The opposition of the heart to the practical design of the gospel, is considered as unbelief. The apostle says of the Jews, "They have not all *obeyed* the gospel, for Esaias saith, Who hath *believed* our report?

The gospel is not a dry system of speculative opinions, designed for our amusement, but a wise collection of doctrines and precepts, intended for the government of our lives. And the faith, which it requires is not merely an act of the understanding in assenting to it as true, but an exercise also of the will in embracing it as good. It is believing with the heart, and receiving the love of the truth. He, who does not in heart receive, and in practice obey, the truth, is guilty of unbelief. His faith, in divine estimation, is of no value, because it has no influence, and produces no effect. The apostle commends the faith of those, "who when they heard the word, received it as the word of God, which effectually works in them that believe." As he says of circumcision, we may say also of faith—It verily profiteth, if we obey the gospel; but if not, it then becomes unbelief. Of the wicked servant who smites his fellows, and drinks with the drunken, our Lord says, "His portion shall be appointed to him with *unbelievers*." His vicious life ranks him with infidels. Elsewhere it is said, "His portion shall be with *hypocrites*," with those, who, in practice contradict what, in words, they profess to believe.

The Jews, who rebelled against God in the wilderness, were destroyed by various judgments, because of their unbelief. They saw the mighty works, which God wrought for their salvation; but they sinned against him, tempted him in their hearts, and provoked him by their disobedience; and therefore it is said, "They *believed not* in God, nor *trusted* in his salvation."

We wonder, perhaps, at those, who heard the gospel from the mouth of Jesus and his apostles, and yet treated it as a fiction and imposture. It is said, that Jesus himself marvelled, because of their unbelief.

They, however, are not the only unbelievers. The gospel, which Christ and his apostles preached, is transmitted to our age.—Have we received it? It cannot be said, we have *all* obeyed it. There are many who live in the allowed practice of the sins, which this manifestly condemns. They are unjust and oppressive to their neighbours; vain and impious in their language; wild and extravagant in their diversions; intemperate and irregular in their indulgences. Do they believe the report, that because of these things the wrath of God is coming on the children of disobedience?

Many are under a spirit of slumber. They have eyes, but see not; ears have they, but they hear not, neither do they understand. They feel no solicitude about their eternal salvation; no concern to understand the terms of it, or to ascertain their interest in it. They do not even profess the gospel, or attend with constancy on its institutions. Do they believe that there is before them an eternal state of retribution?—Do they believe that by the law of God they are condemned already, and that only the divine patience suspends the execution of the sentence which is gone forth against them?—Do they believe that Jesus the Son of God came

down from heaven to call them to repentance, and that on this repentance their eternal happiness depends?—What? believe these things, and yet neglect the means of their salvation? neglect prayer, self-examination and attendance on divine worship? What inconsistency is here!

There are some who attend on the external forms of religion, and yet practically renounce it. They come before God as his people, and hear his words; but they will not do them. The interests of the world are supreme in their thoughts. They are cumbered about these things; but the one thing, which is needful, finds no place in their hearts. They have been warned that many, like them, will stand before the Judge at the last day, and plead, "Lord, Lord, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets; but he will say, I know you not; depart from me ye workers of iniquity." Do they believe this report?

There are some, who pay little regard to the power of Godliness. They believe, in general that there is such a thing as religion; but have very partial and superficial conceptions of it. They keep, or *seem* to keep some of the commandments. They cannot be charged with any of the gross violations of the rules of godliness, sobriety, truth and righteousness; and they hope they shall stand approved. Do they believe that God looks on the heart, and requires truth in the inward parts?—Do they believe that love to God, faith in the Mediator, and benevolence to mankind are essential to religion?—Do not doctrines of this kind seem like idle reports?

If, besides speculative infidels, all who carelessly neglect divine ordinances, all who are ignorant of, and uninfluenced by divine truths, all who live unconcerned about, and inattentive to their eternal salvation, all who regard the interests of the world in preference to heaven and future happiness, if all

these are found in the list of unbelievers, may not the old complaint be renewed, "Who hath believed our report?"

If the report, which is sent among us, is so important and interesting, so rational and credible, as has been represented, Whence is it, that so many disregard it? Is it because they have not capacity to understand its design, or to examine its evidence? They have reason sufficient for their worldly purposes. They are wise for their temporal interest. But there is in them an evil heart of unbelief. Our Saviour says, "This is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, but they have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; for every one, that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

By way of improvement then,

1. Let us reflect on the great guilt of unbelievers in a gospel land, and the awful condemnation, to which they stand exposed.

When we view, with serious attention, the plan of the gospel, it appears to be perfectly adapted to our real necessities, and fully to correspond with our reasonable wishes. Herein God has abounded to us in all wisdom and prudence. Here is a sure foundation laid to support our hope, clear and complete evidence given to gain our faith, the most powerful arguments used to command our consent, and the most suitable assistances offered to animate our resolution. They who perish under these advantages, must impute to themselves their own destruction.

If sin by the commandment becomes exceedingly sinful, by the gospel it becomes exceedingly more so. If they who despised the law of Moses, died without mercy, how severe will be the punishment of those who trample on the grace of

Christ. We lament the unhappy condition of the heathens, who have not heard the report of the gospel: But how much more deplorable will be the condition of those who have heard, and will not believe? We are they to whom this report has come. It will not pass by us with indifference, and leave us as it found us. If we will not receive it, or will not be influenced by it; if we reject it, as if it were not true, or disregard it, as if it were not important, it will, beyond all conception, aggravate our present guilt, and augment our future punishment. The time is just at hand, when mortals will know what is the issue and result of the gospel with respect to them. It will be a savour of life, or of death. O, hear, that your souls may live. Know in this your day, the things which belong to your peace, before they are hidden from your eyes.

2. If there are many who hear the report of the gospel, and yet believe it not, each one should be solicitous for himself.

We are warned that many will be lost. Let us not be high minded, but fear. "Enter in at the strait gate," says our Lord, "for wide is the gate and broad is the way, which leads to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads to life, and few there are who find it." The apostle to the Hebrews urges the same argument. God pronounced concerning the generation which came out of Egypt, that, because of their unbelief, they should not enter into his rest. "Let us therefore fear," says the apostle, "lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it."

When Christ said to his disciples, "One of you shall betray me;" struck with a general astonishment, they felt a solemn anxiety, each one for himself. They said to him, one and all, "Lord, is it

I ?"—"Lord, is it I ?"—Even Judas joined in the enquiry. It was a just concern. How much greater reason have we to be solicitous for ourselves, when we are often warned, that, of the many who are called, few are chosen ?

We believe, in general, that many will perish from among those who enjoy the gospel. We allow that their doom will be awful. But we flatter ourselves, that we shall escape it. Let us enquire, what is the ground of our hope.

Do we think, that the temper of the gospel is formed in us, and that our title to heaven is already secured ? Happy indeed are we, if this is our state and character. But in a matter of such consequence, let us proceed cautiously and hope humbly. Peter, when his Lord asked him, "Lovest thou me ?" answered boldly. "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." But Jesus renewed the question ; and, on receiving the same answer, repeated the question again. He has taught us, that we should not be too hasty in our conclusions, or too confident in our hopes. The gospel instructs us, that we must examine ourselves, whether we are in the faith, that we must prove our own selves, that we must give diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end.

Let us examine the foundation of our hope. Does it rest wholly on the gracious promise of God in Jesus Christ ? If our hope leans on any other support, it must fall. Guilty creatures have no ground but this, on which they can stand.

Let us examine whether we have complied with the terms of the promise. Have we been careful to understand them ? Do we feel our hearts consenting to them ? Do we find that hatred of sin ; that tenderness of conscience ; that watchfulness against temptations ; that delight in duty ; and that steady concern to approve ourselves to God, which are the fruits of gospel faith and repentance ?

Let us examine, what is the influence of our hope. A false hope makes men secure and careless; bold and presumptuous. A true hope will make them watchful and humble, attentive to themselves, and charitable to others. Every one who has this hope, purifies himself.

Let us examine, whether we make improvements in religion. The vain hypocrite glories in his present attainments. The humble christian aspires after perfection.

It is probable there may be some, who will not even pretend to an evidence of their *present* title to salvation. They hope however, that they shall obtain it by a *future* compliance with its terms.

But can you live contented and easy in such a state as this? Do you not think, that many have perished in their sins, who had as strong resolutions, as you have, of future repentance? Do you imagine, that every one, who *intended* to seek salvation, has actually so sought as to obtain? If not, then perhaps *your* intentions will fail you.

Do you expect peculiar favour, because you have taken more pains in religion than some others; or have not sinned so grossly as they? Doubtless you will have full credit for all the good you have done; and you will not be punished for sins, which you never committed in act, or indulged in heart.

But whether you are greater sinners or smaller, is not the present question. If you are under the power of sin, you are under condemnation. And, whatever pains you have taken in some particular matters, if you have not fully consented to the terms of salvation, it is none of yours.

When you see some gross sinners proceeding, with apparent unconcern in their guilty course, you wonder, that they are not alarmed at the danger, which so evidently threatens them.—But, why have not you as much cause to be alarmed as they?

Are not you also exposed to condemnation? Can you be saved without repentance? Must not repentance, in its general nature, be the same thing in you as in them? How then can you feel secure, while you think them in danger?

Is it not probable, that there may be, in the place of punishment, some, whose guilt was not so aggravated as yours?—some, who never sinned against equal light, warnings and restraints?—Some, who never abused so much grace, nor wearied so long patience?—Yea, is it not supposable, that, in the world of misery, there may be those, who have taken as great pains, employed as many thoughts, and spent as much time, in the concerns of their souls, as ever you have done?—Many of the unhappy persons, who will be shut out of Christ's Kingdom, are such as have sought to enter in; but have sought negligently, or unseasonably. They are such as have heard him teach, eaten in his presence, and done many things in his name; but still they have been workers of iniquity.

Can you say more in your favour, than did the young ruler mentioned in the gospel?—Or have you been more solicitous than he, to learn the way to heaven? But he parted with his Saviour: He wished to obtain eternal life; but would not, for its sake, forego the interests of the world.

Have you been more diligent in seeking after Christ, than some, of whom we read, that they went from place to place, and crossed the sea to find him. And yet these were chiefly influenced by a desire to eat of his loaves.

Whatever pains you have taken in religion, and whatever attention you have paid to the report of the gospel; if you have not actually submitted to its precepts, and yielded to the influence of its doctrines, if you have not consented that Christ shall be yours in all his characters, and that you will be

his with all your powers, you have no share in his salvation.

If you can suppose, that many have been lost, who have come as near to the kingdom of heaven as you; then fear lest you come short of it, and give all diligence to make your calling sure.

3. We learn from our subject, that the unsuccessfulness of the gospel is not always to be imputed to the want of fidelity, or ability, in the preachers of it. It must often be ascribed to some other cause.

The prophets of old; the apostles of Jesus; yea, the Saviour himself complained, "Who hath believed our report?"

Zeal and diligence in ministers are doubtless important. As they are more wise and faithful, there is more reason to hope for success.

But there is something also for hearers to do. If they will not receive the report, it is published to them in vain.

Every one sees, that a minister should attend, with great concern, to the duties of his calling, because it is a solemn and weighty calling. But what makes it so solemn and weighty?—Because it relates to men's salvation. Your salvation then is a weighty matter. And ought not *you* to attend to it? Preaching is but a mean of salvation; and means unapplied will never save your souls.

You think your minister should be laborious in his work. But have you nothing to do? He must watch for your souls. Must not you watch for your own?

If a minister should neglect the stated duties of his profession, out of indolence, or love of the world; if he should seldom appear in the sanctuary to deliver the divine report, because he was too much devoted to his ease, or too much entangled in the affairs of this life, to have leisure or spirit for the sacred service; you would not be in doubt what to

think of him, nor very scrupulous what you said of him. But he is no more bound to preach, than you are to hear. If then worldly affections and cares have introduced into your souls such an indifference, or disrelish to divine worship, that you attend it but seldom, and never with any spirit and zeal, pray, tell me, Why are not you as criminal as such a minister?

If a minister, instead of preaching on the great subjects, which concern men's salvation, should only give lectures on history or astronomy, husbandry or politicks; though you might think him a man of learning, you would condemn him as unworthy the name of minister. But if you attend more to the interests, honours or pleasures of the world, than to the salvation of your souls, What are you better than he? As long as you refuse to hear the truth, and to work out your salvation, it is a matter of little consequence to you, whether your minister preaches on piety and religion, or on husbandry and politicks; or indeed whether he preaches at all.

If you supposed, that a minister had no concern for men's salvation; and appeared in his desk from week to week, only to exhibit his talents, or to secure a maintenance; you would think he shamefully prostituted his profession. But if his aim in preaching should be to save your souls, your aim in hearing should be to save your own. If then you come to the house of God only out of custom, or to pass away a dull hour; or if, while you are there, you are thoughtless and inattentive, or hear only to make unkind animadversions; you are no better than the minister, who preaches for lucre or applause.

It is common to remark on the coldness of ministers; but, How will you excuse your own indifference in a matter which infinitely concerns you?

You think that if ministers were more zealous, you should be so too. Perhaps also, if you were more attentive to the word preached, and more diligent in the work of your salvation, you would thus give some courage and animation to them. Let us then strive together, and be fellow workers to the kingdom of God.

Some are ready to say, "If we could hear the word preached in such a manner, if such doctrines were oftener taught; if the terrors of God's word were more strongly displayed, and more closely applied; more good would be done, and we should hope for some sensible benefit." With this expectation, they change the place of their attendance. But imagine not, that all the success depends on the peculiar manner, or engaging address of the speaker. What are preachers, but ministers by whom men believe even as the Lord gives to every man? Glory not in men. Remember that much depends on the blessing of God. And that you may receive this repair to his house, hear his word with a humble, quiet and teachable temper, and lift up your hearts to him for his grace to accompany it. Paul and Apollos can only plant and water. It is God who gives the increase. Look to him, that he would multiply the seed sown, and cause it to bring forth fruit unto life eternal.

SERMON IV.

Pilate's indifference to the Truth.

JOHN, xviii. 38.

Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.

JESUS was, by the Jewish council, brought before Pilate the Roman governour, and accused as one who perverted the nation from their allegiance, and forbade to give tribute to Cesar, saying, that he himself was a king. Pilate having heard the charge, demanded of him, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" Jesus acknowledged, that he had called himself a king. But he added, "My kingdom is not of this world." If it were, "then would my servants fight; that I should not be delivered to the Jews." As I have not permitted, much less attempted any thing of this kind, it is manifest, that "my kingdom is not from hence." Pilate says, "Art thou a king then?" And yet thy kingdom not of this world? "What sort of kingdom dost

thou claim ?" Jesus explains the matter.—" It is as thou sayest :" I am a king. But my kingdom consists in the power and dominion of truth. " To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth ;" might reveal it by my doctrines, confirm it by my works, and impress it on men's hearts by my spirit. " Every one, who is of the truth, heareth my voice." They who believe the truth, and act under its influence, are my subjects.

Pilate seems, from this answer to be satisfied that Jesus had no design against the civil government. He probably viewed his prisoner, as a new philosopher, who was introducing some peculiar system of opinions, which he affected to call by the name of *a kingdom*. But as long as he meddled not with affairs of state, Pilate was willing, that he should teach his own system, and name it according to his own fancy.

Thus far Pilate discovered a commendable honesty and candour. But his indifference to the *doctrine* of Christ was highly censurable. When Jesus said, "I came to bear witness to the truth ;" Pilate indeed asked, " What is truth ?" But, without waiting for an answer, he went out to the Jews, and said, " I find no fault in him." He was neither disposed to condemn him as a usurper, nor to hear him as a teacher.

As Pilate was a Roman, who had resided but a short time in Judea, probably he was little acquainted with the scriptures of the Jews, and their expectations concerning the Messiah. He had, however, full information, that this Jesus assumed a high character. The report of his numerous miracles, and engaging manner of teaching, could not have escaped the governour's ears. He now had an opportunity to see Jesus, and converse with him personally. He had heard his prisoner declare, that

he was sent into the world to bear witness to the truth. He must have been convinced, from what had passed in his presence, that this was no ordinary person, who now stood before him. He repeatedly acknowledged, that he could find no fault in him. Well he knew that the Jews had delivered him for envy. Various expedients he tried to calm their rage, and effect his release. And, finally, when he gave sentence against him, he washed his hands before the multitude, and said, "I am innocent from the blood of this just man: See ye to it."

From these circumstances, it is evident that he entertained a high opinion of Jesus.

The governour had now the fairest opportunity to learn the character which Christ had assumed, and the doctrine which he came to teach. He was sitting on his judgment seat, and Jesus was standing before him. He might propose what questions he pleased: And to questions of importance, proposed with an honest intention, Jesus certainly would have returned a full answer. Pilate was acting in his official capacity, and no man would interrupt him. Who could wish to be under better advantages than these? But good as they were, no use did he make of them.

You think, perhaps, it had been happy for us, if Pilate had shown a little more regard to his own question. It was really important; and you wish to know, how this divine instructor would have answered it. His answer might have solved many doubts, which often arise on the same question.

To Pilate indeed it was important to have received an answer; and it was his own indifference which prevented it. But to you the question is already answered. And whatever Jesus might have said on this occasion, you would have learnt from it nothing more than you may now find in reading his gospel. All his instructions are, in effect, answers to the same question.

Our divine Lord perfectly knew what was in man. If Pilate proposed the question as a matter of curiosity, it might be expected, that Christ would answer it, as he answered other curious questions, by turning the enquirer's attention to something, which more nearly concerned him. But if his desire had been to receive instruction in such truths as immediately related to his duty and salvation, the answer of Jesus would have been, in substance, the same, as he at other times gave to similar questions. On your own account then, you have no cause to regret that Pilate's indifferenee prevented an answer.

If you enquire, what is the truth, in some of the questions, which have divided theological and metaphysical disputants; as how sin first entered into God's creation, and why he has permitted it to exist; wherein consists the moral freedom of rational beings, and how God carries on the great scheme of his government without controling this freedom; how the divine and human natures are united in Jesus Christ; or even how flesh and spirit are united in man—If such as these are your enquiries, I cannot promise you, that you will find an answer in the gospel. And I much doubt whether Christ would have answered them, if they had been proposed when he was on earth.

But if your enquiries are concerning things of real importanee to your salvation, you may certainly meet with abundant satisfaction. "God has given you all things, which pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who has called you to glory and virtue."

Do you wish to know the character of the Deity, and how he is to be worshipped? Read Christ's discourse with the woman of Samaria. There you learn, that "God is a Spirit; and they who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth."

And they who thus worship him, are accepted, in whatever place their devotions are offered. Read also Paul's sermon to the people of Athens. There you are taught that "God who made the world, and all things therein, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped by men's hands, as though he needed any thing from them, seeing he giveth to all life and breath, and all things; and in him we live and move, and have our being."

Would you know wherein your true happiness consists? Read the beginning of Christ's sermon on the mount. There you will find, that happiness little depends on external circumstances, but is essentially connected with a holy and virtuous temper of mind.

Are you solicitous to understand the nature and extent of moral duties? Read on in the same sermon. There you have them, stated with precision, explained with perspicuity, and rescued from the vile interpretations, by which men of corrupt minds had perverted them.

Would you be instructed, what is your great business in life, and what is the most worthy object of your pursuit? Still read on. The Saviour tells you, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth where moths corrupt, and thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves in heaven treasures which will never fail."—"Take no thought for things which concern the body; but seek first the kingdom of God, and these things shall be added."

Do you enquire, what you must do to be saved? Read Christ's answer to the rich young ruler. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." When, professing to have done this from his youth, he asked, what more was necessary, Jesus replied, "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: And come, follow me." You hence

learn, that a partial and external observance of the commands of God will not intitle you to heaven; but there must be in your heart such a supreme love to God, such a full submission to the Saviour, and such a strong regard to the future world, as shall raise you above earthly things, and dispose you to use them charitably, while you have them, and resign them cheerfully, when providence demands them. The answer which the apostles of Jesus gave to similar enquiries, though expressed in different words, is, in substance the same. "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved."

Are you desirous to form a just idea of the *manner* in which you must seek salvation?—Hear what Christ said, when one asked him, whether few would be saved. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many will seek to enter in, and will not be able. When the master of the house has shut the door, many will knock, and say, Lord, open to us, for we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he will say, I know you not: Depart from me all workers of iniquity." You here see, that you must seek salvation with diligence, and without delay; not merely by an observance of the forms of religion, but by renouncing every sin, and complying with every duty. To the same purpose is Paul's advice; "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God, who worketh in you. Do all things without murmuring or disputing."

You will ask perhaps, What ground is there to believe, that God will work in us? Hear the words of Christ himself. "I say unto you, ask and ye shall receive. If a parent will give bread to his children, How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them who ask him?"

Would you learn, which are the principal duties of religion?—Jesus has told you, "These are to love God with all your heart, and your neighbours as yourselves. On these two hang all the law and the prophets."

In short, If you wish to be informed, what are the most important and interesting doctrines in the system of religious truths; only consider, what are the doctrines, which Christ and his apostles have most frequently inculcated, and most warmly urged.

Say now, whether, on the important question, "What is truth?" you need farther instruction than Christ has given you.

If you seek instruction with the spirit of his disciples, who love the truth and hear his voice, you will learn all that immediately relates to your duty, and essentially concerns your salvation. If your enquiries are directed to different objects, look not to Christ for an answer. He came, not to gratify an idle curiosity, but to guide the meek in judgment, and teach the humble his way.

Beware, however, that you indulge not the same indifference which you condemn in Pilate. He declared Jesus to be an innocent and just man; but he still remained an unbeliever. You have the gospel of Christ, and you profess to believe that it is divine. Learn then what it teaches, and practise what it requires.

There are, doubtless, many as negligent as this heathen was: We will consider some instances, in which this criminal negligence appears.

There is, in some, an indifference to religion in general.

Perhaps they outwardly conform to the prevailing usage of their country; but scarcely spend a thought, whether the common religion is true, or whether, in reality, there is any such thing.

They think it best for mankind, that some apprehensions of a Deity and a future judgment, and some forms of religious worship, should be kept up in the world; because these tend to peace and good order. But to religion, considered as a mean of rendering us acceptable to God, and of preparing us for future happiness, they pay no attention.

They may think, that a general acquaintance with the common sentiments of the time and place, is a necessary part of a good education, because it qualifies a man for conversation in some sorts of company. But farther than this, they care little about it. They learn the religion of their own country, for the same reason, that they would study the language and manners of a foreign country, if they were going to travel there.

But if we are rational and immortal creatures, religion must be a matter of infinite importance to us all; and every man is bound immediately to examine what it is. If he is in doubt, whether christianity is divine, he ought to enquire into its evidences. When he is settled in a general belief of its divinity, he is not to rest here, but to apply himself, without delay, to obtain a knowledge of its doctrines, and an interest in its promises.

There are many, who acknowledge, in general, the truth of the gospel; but neglect to enquire, whether they are conformed to it.

If they should meet with a professed infidel, they would urge upon him a care to examine so important a matter, as the truth of revelation. If he appeared to disregard their advice, they would wonder at his negligence in a case so interesting. And yet they are as inattentive to the state of religion in their own hearts, as the infidel is to the credibility of revelation.

But, my friends, What is the gospel like to do for you, if you have not submitted to it? What

advantage do you expect from it, without obeying it? And where is your consistency, in being solicitous that others should believe it, while you neglect to secure the blessings of it?

There are some, who assent to the great doctrines of the gospel, and understand the essential terms of acceptance with God; and, though their consciences testify, that they have never complied with these terms, they are little affected with the danger of their condition.

One would think that *this* should be daily in their minds, should call them often to their closets, and warm their hearts, when they are there; should check the levity of their spirits, and give a distaste to every sensual indulgence. But still their time is divided between their business and their amusements. If convictions, now and then, arise uninvited, and serious thoughts insensibly steal upon them, they smother them in the cares, or dissipate them in the pleasures of life.

There are others who delay the work of religion for the present, and content themselves with the purpose of a future application to it.

Are not some of you, who now hear me, to be found in this class? You call him careless and negligent, who attends not to his worldly business in the proper season. Does not the description belong to you, while you delay a business of infinitely higher importance? Behold, now is the day of salvation. The morrow is not yours. You know not what it will bring forth. You would not dare, I suppose, finally to dismiss all concern about religion, and to fix a resolution, that you will never think of it again. But if it is too important to be forever neglected, it is too important to be at all delayed. Future opportunities are at best, uncertain. It is certain none will be better than the present.

Further: If you are not on your guard against sin; if you expose yourselves to visible temptations, or run into any known and obvious wickedness, you discover as little regard to religion, as little concern about futurity, as Pilate did.

He was careless about religion in general. He seemed indifferent what it was, or whether there were any such thing. You believe, that there is such a thing, and that it is to be found among christians only. Thus far you are settled; and thus far it is well. But what is the design of religion? Does it not teach you to depart from iniquity, and to live piously, justly and soberly? Does it give you hope and comfort in any other way? And will you still go on fearless in a course of sin? Will you practise the very things, which your religion condemns? Will you venture into the places of temptation? Can you reflect on your past sins without remorse, and repeat them without concern? What benefit then do you expect from your religion?

A neglect of, or negligent attendance on the appointed means of religion, indicates a spirit of indifference.

You have God's word. Does it lie by you unexamined? His house is near you. Do you withdraw your feet from it? Or do you read and hear the solemn truths of religion, without attention and self-application? Is your mind wholly unimpressed with the warnings which are given you? Do you make light of the calls and invitations of divine grace? When you hear the terms of salvation proposed, can you reject them without concern; and depart from God's house, with the same cold heart, which you brought there? Do you live without prayer, without communion with God in the closet or family?—Think not of Pilate's indifference. Be astonished at your own.

To awaken the attention of mankind to the calls of religion, What arguments can be used? The subject speaks loudly for itself. No arguments can be urged, of greater force and efficacy, than the natural voice of religion proclaiming its own importance. Every man knows, that if there is a Supreme Deity, there must be such a thing as religion; and that this must, in its very nature, immediately, infinitely, and eternally, concern every rational creature; and himself no less than others. And the man who, with this conviction, can compose his mind to a state of indifference, and dismiss all solicitude, either to know what religion is, or to comply with its demands and secure its hopes, seems to have nonplussed all the powers of reason and eloquence, every power, but that which is divine. For no argument can be set before him more forcible, than that which he already knows, but does not regard; already confesses, but does not feel.

Only then attend to the nature of religion, consider the vast concern which you have in it, view life, as it is, a probationary state soon to terminate, according to the choice you make, in felicity or in woe. Remember what heaven has done to bring you acquainted with religion, and to urge your compliance with it. Look forward to that serious hour, when you will stand between this and the eternal world. Anticipate the apprehensions, which guilt will then feel; the judgment which wisdom will then form; and the joys, which piety will then give. Make now the choice, which you will hereafter approve; and reprobate the conduct, which soon you must condemn. You cannot feel indifferent about religion long. Indulge your indifference no longer.

SERMON V.

The horrible Guilt of those who strengthen the hands of the wicked.

JEREMIAH, xxiii. 14.

I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing:— They strengthen the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness.

WHILE the Jews continued under God's special care and protection, he favoured them with the stated ministry of his holy prophets, who, as occasion required, warned them of their dangers, reproved them for their iniquities, and exhorted them to repentance. The plainness of their preaching, and the severity of their rebukes, in times of degeneracy, often awakened the angry resentments of their hearers. In these times there arose false prophets, who, to gain popular applause, preached smooth and flattering doctrines. Such preachers met with a welcome reception among the vicious and ungodly, who always love to have their guilty consciences pacified, without the selfdenial of forsaking their sins.

These deceivers and flatterers of the people, God by his prophet condemns in the latter part of this chapter, and particularly in the words which have been read.

That the wicked should forsake their way, must evidently be agreeable to the will of a holy and merciful God. Every thing, therefore, which tends to encourage their hearts in impenitence, and strengthen their hands in iniquity, must highly provoke his displeasure.

Various are the ways, in which sinners strengthen each other's hands. Example and enticement; an open neglect and avowed contempt of the instituted means of religion; pleading in defence of vice; ridiculing the virtues of a godly character; opposition to the great doctrines of religion; and the propagation of corrupt and licentious opinions, all tend to this issue.

"Now whatever be the means, by which men strengthen the hands, and hinder the repentance of evildoers, they commit an horrible thing in the sight of God."

This is the observation which lies before us, and which we will endeavour to illustrate.

1. All sin is horrible in its nature.

It is contrary to the character and will of an infinite Being—a Being of glorious purity, supreme authority and almighty power—a Being who cannot be tempted with evil, nor even look on iniquity—a Being, in whose presence the stars are extinguished, and the angels veil their faces.

"Sin, by the commandment, becomes exceeding sinful." Every offence abounds in the view of the conscience, when the law with power enters the mind. This is exceeding broad. It extends to every motion of the heart, and action of the life. It requires truth in the inward parts, and holiness in all the conversation. It forbids the act of iniquity, and condemns the thought of foolishness.

God's utter abhorrence of sin is clearly marked by the awful judgments, which, in his providence, are executed on the workers of iniquity; and more strongly expressed by the amazing punishment, which, in his word, is threatened against the finally impenitent.

The purity of the divine character, and the horrible nature of sin, are still more strikingly displayed in the grand and surprising method adopted for the redemption of our degenerate and guilty race. We are not redeemed from our vain conversation, by silver and gold, but by the precious blood of the Son of God. The great God our Saviour gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from our iniquities, and save us from the wrath to come.

If all sin is so contrary to the holy nature and perfect law of God, and to the merciful design of the Saviour's death; think, I beseech you, what indignity, what insult, you offer to the divine majesty, when you not only do iniquity yourselves, but strengthen them who do it. To have pleasure in them who work evil, and to delight in the perverseness of the wicked, is the completion of a vicious character, and the last stage in the progress of guilt.

What a fearful thing must it be, to fall into the hands of the living God, thus dishonoured and provoked!—Who knows the power of his anger!

2. To strengthen the hands and hinder the repentance of sinners, is to oppose the great plan of the divine government. It is to set your faces and lift your hands against the Almighty.

Ever since the apostasy of our race, all the measures of the divine government have been uniformly directed to the great and benevolent purpose of recovering sinners from their wickedness, and bringing them to repentance and happiness.

For this end, God was pleased, immediately after our revolt, to reveal a Saviour, who should

make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness. For this purpose he sent forth his prophets and ministers, inspired them with divine and heavenly knowledge by his own good Spirit, and commanded them to admonish and instruct a secure and guilty world.

With the same merciful intention, he has given a standing revelation of his will, explained the nature and displayed the importance of the religion which he requires; confirmed this revelation by miracles, preserved it by his providence, and continued, from age to age, the evidence of its divine original, by the striking accomplishment of a series of marvellous predictions.

In pursuance of this great and glorious design he sent down from heaven his own Son, the express image of his person, who having assumed our flesh, dwelt among men, taught the way of God in truth, suffered death to expiate our guilt, rose from the grave to display his power over death, and returned to heaven to appear as an advocate for us. With this view, he also instituted the publick preaching of the gospel, and commissioned his ministers to warn every man and teach every man in all wisdom, and beseech them, in his name, to be reconciled to him.

The dispensations of his providence are adapted and intended to make all men know, that to forsake him, is an evil and a bitter thing. The connexion between vice and misery, and between virtue and happiness, is obvious to common observation, and felt in common experience. This divine establishment is designed as a standing call to virtue, and warning against vice. Besides this, God often sees fit, by publick and national calamities, to condemn and punish a general corruption of manners.

In addition to all the external means of repentance and holiness, God, unsought and unsolicited, grants to sinners the awakening and convincing in-

fluences of his gracious Spirit. These divine operations are sometimes carried so high, that the spirit is said to *strive* with them; and continued so long, that he is said to be *grieved*, and even *wearied* with their perverseness.

Such measures God has taken, and such he is still pursuing, for the recovery of sinners. What a horrible thing must it then be, for you to strengthen their guilty hands, embolden their daring hearts, and prevent their return to God? What impious opposition is this to his holy will? What insult on his authority? What contempt of his power and grace, his wisdom and love? What can be conceived more insolent and provoking? How shall he pardon you for this?"

3. To strengthen the hands of the wicked is a horrible thing, because it directly tends to the misery of mankind; and therefore is the reverse of that benevolence, which ought to govern us in all our conduct toward one another.

The tendency of a wicked life is misery in this world; and the end of it, more intolerable misery in the next. Repentance is the only condition of the divine pardon; holiness is an indispensible qualification for that eternal happiness, which the gospel reveals.

The fruits and consequences of final impenitence are, in scripture, represented by language of most awful import, and by images which strike the feeling and attentive mind with amazement and horror.

That they will be dreadful, beyond our present conceptions, may justly be concluded from the nature of sin as an opposition to God's character and government; and especially from the extraordinary method which he has taken for our redemption. Had not the demerit of sin been exceedingly great, a divine Saviour would not have interposed by his own death to rescue us from it.

Consider then, ye who strengthen the hands of the sinner, you are urging him forward into that everlasting destruction, which is so great, so amazingly great, that to save men from it, the Son of God himself suffered a most painful death. If you obstruct and prevent his repentance, you hinder him from obtaining a share in that salvation which was purchased, not by silver and gold, but by the precious blood of a divine Redeemer. Can you think it a small thing to be active in bringing one of your fellow immortals to a condition so awful, as that which awaits the ungodly?

The apostle cautions Christians, not to use their liberty, in a manner which might embolden others in inquity, or prove a stumbling block to the weak, lest by these means, a brother should perish for whom Christ died. For when we sin against our brother, we sin against Christ. Now if it be criminal and dangerous to occasion the destruction of others by an imprudent use of innocent liberty, What a horrible thing must it be, directly and intentionally to strengthen the hands of the wicked, and throw obstructions in the way of their repentance? Awful is the denunciation of the Son of God against those, who shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, and neither enter into it themselves, nor suffer those who are entering, to come in.

Consider farther; when you strengthen the hands of an evildoer, you contribute to the spread and diffusion of vice and misery. If one sinner repents, and turns to a godly life, none can tell how much evil may be prevented, and how much good may be done. If this sinner continues in his guilty course, we cannot measure the greatness, nor comprehend the extent of the mischief which may follow. He may corrupt and destroy others; and these may still spread the corruption farther; and from hand to hand, it may be circulated round to an unknown

distance, and be transmitted down to remote generations. And how many will finally perish, by means of one sinner whom you have strengthened, you cannot foresee.

If you should hereafter be convinced of the error of your ways, yet you will not be able to recall the corruptions which you have communicated, nor to repair the mischiefs which you have occasioned. Some, whom you have seduced, may be already in a state of punishment. If they are alive, yet they may not be within *your* reach; or they may by this time be too much confirmed in wickedness, to be recovered by *your* advice. Or could you reclaim *them*, yet you know not how many they have seduced. The evil, which originated with you, may now be propagated too far, and infused into too many for you to think of extinguishing it. If by your repentance, you can save your own soul, it is happy: You cannot, by your counsels and warnings, save theirs.

If your strengthening the hands of evildoers may be productive of so great, so extensive, so lasting mischief to the souls of your fellow men, must you not confess it to be a horrible thing?

4. By this conduct, you support the cause, and cooperate with the influence of that evil spirit, who works in the children of disobedience.

Sin was first introduced into our world by the artifice of Satan, who, by pride and rebellion, having fallen under God's wrath, seduced man into transgression. He is still carrying on a design in opposition to the kingdom of God. He still goes about seeking whom he may destroy. He is called the ruler of the darkness of this world, and the prince of the power of the air. The place where error and vice abound, is called the place, where Satan's throne is. His kingdom is a kingdom of darkness, delusion and wickedness: The kingdom of God is a kingdom of

light, truth and benevolence. They who pervert the right ways of the Lord, and turn others from the faith, imitate the character, second the design, and do the work of the devil; and are called his children, his ministers and servants. They are agents in his cause, and factors in his trade: They act under his influence, and in conformity to his will; they must therefore, take a share in his punishment hereafter, as well as in his guilt and infamy here.

While we contemplate, with horror, the character of infernal spirits, drawn in the sacred writings, we should consider it as a most horrible thing for human beings, in a state of probation, to imitate this character.

Those evil spirits, who left their own habitation, are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness to the judgment of the great day. For them no redemption is provided; to them no probation is granted; hope never cast's a smile on them.

We are placed under hope. Salvation is purchased for us, and offered to us. A day of probation is assigned us. We are all under like circumstances of guilt and danger, and under like offers of grace and pardon; and we are all exposed to the machinations of a common enemy. Shall any of us revolt from the interest of humanity and love, and join the adversary? O ye heavens, be astonished at this, and be ye horribly afraid!—Let us stretch out friendly hands, encourage, animate and strengthen one another in the work of our common salvation, and become fellow helpers to the kingdom of God.

5. To strengthen the hands of the wicked is a horrible thing, because we thus become partakers of their sins.

When others, by our enticement, example, or encouragement, or in consequence of any licentious errors, which they have caught from us, are induced to commit iniquity, we share with them in the guilt.

They are answerable for yielding to our influence, in opposition to the better information, which they have received; but we must stand answerable for all that we have spoken and done, to draw them away from virtue and truth; and for our neglect of that which we should have done to lead and encourage them in the path of wisdom, and prevent their apostasy. If we have seduced them to, or encouraged them in, an evil course; while they pursue it, they are sinning at our expense, and at our risk, as well as their own. They are agents and factors under us, and with them we must finally divide the fatal reward of iniquity.

Let us realize, how great is the guilt of our own proper iniquities, and we shall think it a horrible thing to augment it by a participation in the guilt of other men. And yet how great a proportion of some men's guilt will come from this quarter? They have done much to corrupt from virtue the simple and incautious, and to confirm evildoers in their wickedness. Their influence has run far, and spread wide. It operates, at distant hand, on many whom they never have seen. It works without their knowledge, grows while they sleep, and is accumulating their guilt, while they are unaware of the mischief. Of those who bring in damnable heresies, and who seduce many to follow their pernicious ways, the apostle says, "Their judgment now, of a long time, lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

6. The sin under consideration is an horrible thing, as it is directly contrary to the commands of God, and marked with his peculiar abhorrence.

We have required to rebuke our brother, and not suffer sin upon him; to exhort one another, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin; to take heed lest any root of bitterness, springing up, trouble us, and thereby many be defiled; to have compassion on sinners, and save them with fear, pulling

them out of the fire; to beware, lest we put a stumbling block, or an occasion to fall, in our brother's way. Of him who turneth away from the law of God and draweth others after him, Moses says, "The Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord will smoke against him, and he will separate him to all evil." The most infamous part of Jeroboam's character was, that he made Israel to sin; and this is assigned as a special reason of God's judgment on him and his house. The chief ground of the woes denounced against the Pharisees, was, that they shut up the kingdom of God against men. God's justice is glorified in heaven for his vengeance on those who had corrupted the earth. One can scarcely without shuddering, read Paul's awful rebuke on the sorcerer of Paphos, who sought by his artifice to turn away from the faith the deputy of the country. "O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the Devil, thou enemy of all righteousness; Wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? Behold now the hand of the Lord is upon thee." Paul says of those Jews, who forbade the apostles to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, "They please not God, and are contrary to all men; they fill up the measure of their sins always, that wrath may come upon them to the uttermost."

We see then the horrible nature, and fearful danger of the sin condemned in the text—"strengthening the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness." Let us apply the subject.

You will first apply it to the ministers of the gospel, and the publick teachers of religion. I must justify the application. Doubtless they are deeply concerned in it. If they cease to warn the wicked of his evil way, if they pervert the word of God, if by their example they countenance wickedness, or by their doctrine disseminate error, it may justly be

apprehended that many will perish by their means, and at their hands will be required the souls which thus are lost. But know, my brethren, your minister is not alone concerned in the subject. Permit him in his turn, to apply to you.

You have declared yourselves the subjects of God's kingdom; see that you shut not up the way to it, and that you lay no obstructions before those who are entering into it. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. Take heed lest, by your means, the way of truth be evil spoken of. Let your conversation in all things, be as becomes the gospel of Christ. If you walk according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; if you neglect the worship and ordinances of God's house; if you talk lightly about the doctrines and duties of religion; if you plead in favour of corrupt opinions; or propagate by your discourse, or other means, those sentiments, which tend to beguile unstable souls; you do more to strengthen the hands of the wicked, and to prevent their repentance, than if you had never assumed the christian character.

Many are looking to you; some that they may be guided by your example; some that they may mark your miscarriages, and find occasion to reproach both you and your religion. Walk in a plain path because of your observers; by well doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; shew yourselves in all things a pattern of good works, that they, who would accuse you, may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.

Heads of families will not fail to apply a subject so pertinent to them.

The virtue of those under your care depends much on your prudence and fidelity. If you command your children and household, and train them up in virtuous sentiments and manners, you may

hope, that through God's grace, they will keep the way of the Lord, and that you shall rejoice, beholding their good conversation in Christ. But if they make themselves vile, and you lay on them no restraints, and give them no warning of their danger; if amidst the instructions which cause to err, you leave them unguarded and defenceless; if, far from instructing and warning them in this unexperienced and critical period, you corrupt them by your own example and conversation, strengthen their hands in their evil works, and fortify their consciences against the calls to repentance; What will you do, when God riseth up; and when he visiteth, what will you answer him? If it be a horrible thing to strengthen other sinners in wickedness, What name shall we find to express your guilt, when you hide yourselves from your own flesh, and harden yourselves against them, as if they were not yours?

Let the young beware, lest they strengthen each other's hands in evil doing.

You have opportunities to do much good, or much evil among those of your age, and those who often associate with you.

If deeply impressed with a sense of religion and the future world, you walk in the path of wisdom and virtue; if you have no fellowship with the wicked in their evil works, but rather reprove them; your presence will restrain the vicious, your reproofs awaken the careless, and your examples strengthen the virtuous. A reformation discovering itself among a few, may hopefully spread and extend its influence to many.

But if you walk in vanity and vice, set your tongues against the heavens; make light of the great concerns of futurity; hear with eagerness and communicate with pleasure, the sentiments which tend to licentiousness; make a mock of sin, and of the threatenings of God; and labour to for-

tify yourselves and others against the convictions, which might lead to repentance ; you will do more, than you can imagine, to corrupt the young generation, to which you belong, and, alas, I fear, few of you will return from your wickedness.

Finally. If it is so horrible a thing to strengthen evildoers, it is horrible also to be strengthened in evil doing. Beware then, lest, being corrupted by the example and advice of the wicked, you grow bold in sin, and, become hardened in guilt. "If sinners entice thee, hearken not to them. Enter not into the path of the wicked ; go not in the way of evil men : Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away ! Get wisdom, take fast hold of instruction ; let her not go : Keep her, for she is thy life, exalt her, and she shall promote thee ; forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee."

SERMON VI.

The wonderful Destruction of those who despise the Gospel.

ACTS, xiii. 40, 41.

Beware therefore lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish: For I work a work in your days; a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it to you.

THE Apostle Paul, preaching to the Jews in Antioch, gives them a summary view of the nature and evidences of the gospel, its extensive design, and its glorious privileges; and then in the words of our text, solemnly warns them of that destruction, which, by their contempt of this gospel, they were urging on themselves. "Beware lest that come upon you, which is spoken in the prophets."

The passage in the prophets, to which the Apostle alludes, is in Habakkuk, Chap. i. ver. 5. "Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: For I work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you."

The event here predicted is God's work of judgment on impenitent sinners; as appears from the following verses, in which the terrible desolation coming on the guilty land of Judea, is drawn in all the strong colours of prophetick description.

"Behold, ye despisers, and perish," i. e. Ye, who are despisers, will perish. In the same form of speech, Peter expresses the doom of the sorcerer: "Thy money perish with thee," or thy money will perish with thee. "Wonder and perish!" i. e. Ye will perish wonderfully—in a manner which ye will not believe though it be told you. The expression is agreeable to the idiom of the scripture language. God's *purpose* and *grace* signify his gracious purpose. *Life* and *immortality* are immortal life. The desires of the *flesh* and of the *mind* are the desires of the fleshly mind. The things which pertain to *life* and *godliness* are the things which pertain to a godly life.

The words of our text will lead us,

I. To consider the character of these *despisers*, who are so solemnly warned of their danger.

II. To shew in what respect it may be said, They will perish *wonderfully*.

III. To enforce the warning which is given them: *Beware* lest this destruction come upon you.

I. We will consider the character of these *despisers*.

As the Apostle is opening the nature, proposing the evidences, and displaying the grace of the gospel, so, by *despisers*, he must intend those who despise religion: especially such as treat with contempt the great salvation purchased by the Son of God, and preached by the apostles in his name.

1. There are some who despise all *religion*, and reject even those fundamental principles, which revelation presupposes; such as the existence and providence of God, the difference between moral good

and evil, and the freedom and accountableness of man.

Such despisers there were in David's time. "The wicked triumph, and the workers of iniquity boast themselves, and utter hard things; they slay the widow and murder the fatherless; yet they say, The Lord will not see, neither will the God of Jacob regard it." The wicked, through the pride of their countenance, will not seek after God. They say, God hath forgotten. He hideth his face, he will never see it. They contemn God, and say in their heart, Thou will not require it. The prophet Isaiah complains of some atheistical mockers, who, when God called to mourning and weeping, gave themselves to luxury and riot, saying, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

If men can persuade themselves that there is no God, or that he exercises no moral government; that there is no difference between virtue and vice, except so far as the one, or the other may serve their present convenience; and that, consequently, there is no future state of retribution; they will, of course, view religion in whatever form it appears, as alike useless and vain. The only religion, in this case, is to enjoy life while we can, and despise death when it comes.

But these licentious sentiments are so contrary to the dictates of reason and common sense, that men can never entertain them, unless their minds are first debauched by the habits of vice, and their judgments perverted by a consciousness of guilt. They who say in their hearts, there is no God, are corrupt, and have done abominable works. They admit the principles of irreligion, to fortify their consciences against the terrors of future judgment. These principles must be the effects of previous corruption: They cannot be the suggestions of sober reason. We need but open our eyes to be rational-

ly convinced of the existence and government of one eternal, independent, all perfect Being. "The invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and godhead." As we are intelligent creatures, we must be accountable for our conduct. Our natural desire of immortality shews, that we are designed for a future existence. As God is a holy and righteous governor, we may naturally expect that he will make a difference between the virtuous and the wicked. In the present state there is no equal distribution of rewards and punishments; there must then be another state in which this distribution may take place.

2. There are some, who pretend to believe the truths of natural religion; but despise *all revelation.* From the supposed sufficiency of human reason for all the purposes of religion, they conclude, that no supernatural discovery ever has been, or ever will be made.

They, indeed, profess to believe as much of the Bible, as reason previously dictates; for truth is not the less truth for being found there, but on the *authority* of revelation they will believe nothing; for if reason is sufficient, revelation is needless.

In the days of the apostles there were many, who professing themselves to be wise, became fools. In their exalted opinion of human wisdom, they despise as foolishness the doctrine of the cross. But, with all their wisdom they knew not God, knew not his true character, nor the way of acceptance with him. It therefore pleased God, by this which the world called the foolishness of preaching, to save them who believed. The doctrine of a Saviour, crucified for the sins of men, was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but to them who were saved, it was the power and the wisdom of God.

Reason and revelation choose to walk hand in hand; and nothing can be more unkind than to set them at variance.

Reason is employed in discovering the existence and perfections of God, in examining the evidences of revelation, in ascertaining the sense of particular doctrines and precepts, and in making the proper application of them to ourselves. But then reason, with its highest improvements, cannot without the aid of revelation, lead us to the knowledge of all necessary truths.

There are many things, which though they appear reasonable, when they are suggested, yet, without a previous suggestion, would never have occurred to our thoughts. The knowledge of natural religion is much improved by the gospel. The most learned men among the heathens had but imperfect and confused notions of the divine character and government, of moral obligation and a future state. In comparison with the knowledge now attained by common Christians. What can it be but the gospel, which makes this difference? Reason was as good in ancient, as it is in modern times. Besides, there are some important matters concerning which reason can give us no satisfactory information.

Every man, on the least attention, must be convinced, that he has violated the moral obligations under which his Creator has placed him. He is then worthy of punishment. And how shall he know, whether God will forgive him? If he hopes that forgiveness may be obtained, yet, How shall he learn, what terms God will require? Repentance is a reasonable exercise: But can this, on its own intrinsick worth, claim forgiveness? The sinner is dependant on the mercy of God: But how far, how often, to what subjects, and on what conditions he will shew mercy, we learn only from revelation; reason cannot inform us.

Much less could reason discover the method, in which God dispenses his pardoning mercy to fallen men. It is the gospel only, which teaches us, how God can be just and the justifier of them who believe. The sufferings of the Son of God for the redemption of an apostate race, is the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which he has revealed by his spirit.

3. There are some, who acknowledge, in general, the truth of the gospel; but despise its *peculiar doctrines.*

In our Saviour's day, many among his professed disciples, offended at the doctrine of his atonement for human guilt, went back and walked no more with him.

Paul speaks of some, who, by denying the resurrection, had made shipwreck of their own faith; and, by teaching that the resurrection was past, had overthrown the faith of others.

Peter forewarns christians, that, in the last days, there will come scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of Christ's coming to judge the world?

John speaks of certain deceivers, who denied that Jesus Christ was come in the flesh, and consequently denied the reality of his atonement for the sins of men. "Every spirit" says this Apostle, "which confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is the spirit of antichrist." A denial of his incarnation and atonement, is in effect, a denial of the whole gospel, a rejection of all his peculiar doctrines. These deceivers professed to be without sin. As they had no sensible conviction of their own guilt, they saw no occasion for an expiatory sacrifice. Hence they went into the visionary opinion, that Christ suffered only in appearance, not in reality.

In opposition to this dangerous heresy, the apostle, in the beginning of his epistle, asserts the universal sinfulness of mankind, as the true reason of

There are, indeed, burning lips, which sometimes accompany a wicked heart. There are some fulsome hypocrites, whose religion wholly consists in the talk of the lips. These often expose religion to contempt by an improper manner of urging it into conversation. Be ye not like them. But then if you feel an aversion to serious dicourse, and a disposition to divert it, whenever it meets you, How dwells the love of God in you?

What you esteem will influence your *practice.* That which you make your great end, will chiefly govern your actions. If your heart is set on any particular object, whether it be honour, wealth, or pleasure, that object you will pursue with an engagedness proportionable to the estimation which you make of it. Enquire then; Do the blessings of the gospel command your desires?—Do its promises animate your hopes?—Do its threatenings awaken your fears?—Do its precepts guide your steps?—If you are strangers to this holy influence of the gospel, how can you say, you do not despise it? The world is not viewed with indifference. If this has the highest place in your mind, the gospel is despised. You cannot serve God and mammon. If you hold to the one, you despise the other.

You are solicitous to acquire an *interest* in that which you esteem most valuable. Your love of the world prompts your diligence to get a share in it. Your affection for a particular person makes you studious to please him. If you value the gospel of Christ, you will feel a deep concern to obtain the great salvation which it reveals. You will be careful to understand the terms of it. You will renounce every thing, which you know to be contrary to it. You will count all things but loss in comparison with it. You will cut off your right hand, and pluck out your right eye, when it causes you to offend. You will not run the hazard of

losing your soul, though you might thus gain the whole world. Such a price you will judge infinitely too great for the purchase. The world cannot be given back in exchange for the soul.

If you value an object, you will be careful to *ascertain* your interest in it. The husbandman will not purchase a farm of him, who cannot make him a good title. The merchant will not trust his wares to those who appear unable to pay him. If one should tell you, your title to your estate was precarious, you would not rest till you had examined it, taken advice upon it, and made it as secure as possible. If you should hear, that some principal debtor was like to fail, you would take measures immediately to save your debt. If you have the same value for the blessings of the gospel, as you have for the interests of the world, you will be as prudent and diligent to secure them. You will examine yourself, whether you are in the faith, and whether Christ is formed in you. Every doubt which arises in your mind, will give you sensible concern, and put you on new enquiry. You will give diligence to the full assurance of hope.—How do you find the matter?—Can you live from month to month, and from year to year, careless, and unconcerned, without a clear, or even a probable evidence of your title to the great salvation of the gospel? Let me tell you, most certainly you despise it. You would not remain thus indifferent, if any considerable worldly interest was in the same precarious situation.

What you chiefly value, you will spare no *pains* or *expense* to secure. To this you will make all other interests subservient. Go then, imitate the wisdom of the husbandman, who, having found a treasure hid in a field, sold all that he had, and purchased that field—adopt the prudence of the merchant, seeking goodly pearls, who, having found

one pearl of great price, sold all his goods to procure it. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Lay up treasures in heaven. Imagine not that a few transient thoughts, cold petitions and lifeless endeavours, will entitle you to glory. If your seeking rises no higher than thus, it is but neglect. In the salvation of the soul there is such an evident and undisputed superiority to every worldly interest, that this indolent seeking of the former, while the latter is pursued with ardour, is little better than direct contempt. And how will you escape, if you neglect this great salvation?—A salvation declared to be great by the price which the Redeemer has paid for the purchase of it, by the affectionate importunity with which he has urged your acceptance of it, and by the joy of heaven over those who obtain a share in it.

Once more. What we esteem, we ordinarily choose that *others* should esteem too. We are pleased when they approve our judgment. It grieves us to see them despise the interests which we value, and to hear them reproach the friends whom we honour. If we love the gospel, we shall desire that all men would embrace it. We shall openly profess our belief of, and attachment to it. If we have, by any means, cast a stain upon it, we shall, on conviction, immediately wipe it off by a voluntary confession of our error. We shall recommend this gospel to others by a regular attendance on its ordinances, and exemplary obedience to its precepts. When we hear men reproach its heavenly doctrines, or see them trample on its sacred institutions, our hearts will be warmed with holy indignation. We shall wish to see its influence among men more extensive and powerful, and shall gladly contribute our aid to this important purpose.

Enquire now, how it is with you, Can you rest contented without a profession of the gospel, and

an attendance on its ordinances? Can you plead, or patiently hear others plead in defence of licentious opinions, or in excuse of ungodly practices? Can you listen with smiles of pleasure, or even stand with silent indifference, when men cavil at the evidences, ridicule the doctrines, and vilify the institutions of the gospel? Can you take a part in, or refrain to bear testimony against the impious slanders, which profane sinners wantonly throw out against it?—You certainly despise it.—Beware then, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets, Behold ye despisers, and wonder and perish.

To open and apply this warning, will be the business of our next discourse.

SERMON VII.

The wonderful Destruction of those who despise the Gospel.

ACTS, xiii. 40, 41.

Beware therefore lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish: For I work a work in your days; a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it to you.

IN our preceding discourse we illustrated the character of these despisers, whom the Apostle in our text, so solemnly warns of their danger. We proceed,

II. To shew in what respects, it may be said, They will perish wonderfully.

Here are two things asserted: That destruction awaits contemptuous sinners; and that this destruction, when it comes, will be wonderful.

First, Destruction awaits contemptuous sinners.

The Apostle says, "If righteousness come by the law, Christ is dead in vain." If salvation is attainable by the mere strength of nature, and by the works of righteousness which we already have done, or in future shall do, in vain is the gospel plan con-

trived and revealed. Christ came to save them who are lost. If we are not lost, we need no Saviour: If we are lost, we can be saved only by him. "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ, neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name given under heaven among men, whereby they must be saved.

If this scheme was so important, that the wisdom of God would not save fallen men without it; surely they who despise and reject it, will, in the justice of God, be excluded from the benefit of it.

How far the divine mercy, through a Redeemer, may be extended to heathens who have never known the gospel, it is not material to enquire. Let it if you please, be admitted, that some of them will be partakers of God's mercy without a direct and explicit faith in Jesus Christ; yet this is nothing to us, who have actually heard of this divine Saviour, and to whom salvation has been offered in his name. If we despise the redemption, we sin wilfully, for we have received the knowledge of the truth; and for us there remains no more sacrifice for sin. You will tell me, the Apostle Peter has said, God is no respecter of persons; but, in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him." Will you hence conclude, that there is no need of faith in Christ, and submission to his gospel? This certainly cannot be Peter's meaning; for, Would he preach the gospel of salvation; and, at the same time, tell his hearers, that it was of no importance to them? His meaning evidently is, that salvation is not *confined* to any particular nation, as the Jews proudly imagined; but that the offer of it is made without distinction, to men of all nations. So this Apostle elsewhere expresses the matter; God puts no difference between Jews and Gentiles, purifying their hearts by faith." He

grants to the latter, as well as the former, repentance unto life."

It was upon the occasion of his being sent to preach the gospel to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, that Peter made this reflection, "In every nation he that feareth God is accepted of him." This Cornelius, it is said, "was a devout man, one that feared God, gave much alms, and prayed always." But all his goodness did not make it unnecessary for him to hear and obey the gospel. A vision was sent from heaven to inform him, that his righteousness was not sufficient; but he must look out for farther instruction. He was ordered to call for Peter, who should teach him words, by which he might be saved.

Some perhaps will ask, What if this devout Gentile had never heard of the gospel, but had died in the exercise of that religion, which he had already learned, and hitherto practised? In this case, What would have become of him? Would he not have been saved? But this is a question of mere curiosity and speculation. The solution of it will no way affect us, who have been actually called to the fellowship of the gospel. God could, no doubt, as easily have revealed Christ to him by a heavenly messenger, as direct him whither to send for an apostle, who should teach him the way of salvation. And if the means of knowledge had not been within his reach, we cannot pretend to say, that a Saviour would not have been more immediately discovered to him.

But the knowledge of the gospel certainly was important; and the means of this knowledge were attainable; and Cornelius must conduct accordingly. Let me now ask you; What if he had disobeyed the heavenly vision? What if he had refused to send for Peter, or to hear him, when he came, or to comply with his instructions when they were given? What if, insisting on the sufficiency of his own

prayers and alms to insure his acceptance with God; he had exploded the idea of faith in Christ, reliance on his grace, baptism in his name, and a profession of his gospel? Would you then have supposed, there was any sincerity in his prayers, any piety in his devotions, any virtue in his alms and works of righteousness? Do you think, God will be pleased with the prayers of those, who refuse to follow the directions which they pray for? Do you imagine, he will accept the alms and offerings of those, who deny him that obedience, which is better than sacrifice?

Reason teaches us our obligation to obey the will of God. How then can men pretend to follow reason, when they reject the instructions of revelation, and despise the way of salvation which this discovers for guilty mortals?

Whatever may be the condition of heathens, who never heard of Christ, awful must be the fate of those, who, having heard of him, despise and refuse the only Lord who bought them.

The gospel has declared, that "They who believe not, shall die in their sins; that they are condemned already, because they believe not in the name of the only begotten Son of God." If obedience to God is necessary to salvation, faith in Christ must be necessary; for this is the command of God, "that we believe on him whom he hath sent."

"When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, he will take vengeance, not only on them who know not God, but also on such as obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."

We see, then, that destruction awaits unbelieving, contemptuous sinners.

Our text teaches us, *Secondly*, That this destruction, when it comes, will be *wonderful.* "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish."

1. The phrase may intend, that such sinners will perish *unexpectedly*, will meet with *unlooked for* destruction; with a punishment which they little thought of, and which therefore will fill them with wonder and astonishment. It is said of Jerusalem, "Because she remembered not her last end, therefore she came down wonderfully."

The scripture represents the destruction of sinners, in general, as coming upon them by surprise. This will especially be the fate of those who despise the gospel. Their contempt of, and inattention to their salvation must arise either from unfeeling stupidity, or blind self flattery. They either think not at all, or, when they hear the warnings of God, they cry, "Peace and safety." Therefore sudden destruction comes upon them. If they had any sensible convictions of their own guilt and realising apprehensions of the destruction which awaits them, they would prize the gospel beyond all the treasures of the universe. Its gracious invitations and urgent calls would be more welcome to them, than cold water to the thirsty, liberty to captives, or pardon to condemned malefactors. They would listen to them with avidity, and embrace them with ardour and joy.

The greater part of sinners find some way or other to delude themselves into a persuasion, that they shall escape the judgment of God. If they do not expressly deny the truth, yet they studiously evade the force of the divine threatenings. They either banish them from their minds, or view them as respecting times afar off and leaving room for a future repentance; or they flatter themselves, that God

will never execute them, or will not execute them so fully as the language of scripture seems to import: Or they indulge a vain, unfounded opinion of their own goodness; or, hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, they resist the impression of every warning, however pertinent and solemn. Destruction, when it falls on such sinners, will take them by terrible surprise.

How will the *atheist*, the *infidel*, the haughty *unbeliever* be amazed, when he finds the awful reality of those eternal scenes of woe, which now he derides, as the sickly dreams of weak and credulous religionists!—How will the stupid *sons of pleasure* be astonished, when in hell they lift up their eyes, being in torments, and perceive themselves deeply sunk in that gulf of misery, in which there is no consolation and from which there is no redemption!—What severe disappointment will mortify the proud heart of the *hypocrite*, when, full of the hopes of heaven, he drops into destruction, and beholds, in the kingdom of God, thousands whom he had uncharitably reprobated!—What dreadful surprise will overwhelm the *presumptuous* sinner, who, while he is putting far off the evil day, and relying on the purpose of a future repentance, is arrested in all his guilt and driven away in his wickedness!—How will *profane* and *impious* wretches be confounded, who, while they mock at sin, scoff at the judgment to come, and sport with eternal damnation, are seized in the midst of their impiety, and consigned to everlasting burnings!

"Consider this, ye who forget God, lest he tear you in pieces; and there be none to deliver."

2. The destruction of despisers will be wonderful, as it will *exceed* all present *conception*. "There is a strange punishment for the workers of iniquity."

Some temporal judgments are so great, that they

are called strange and marvellous works. Thus speaks the Almighty, by the mouth of his prophet, "For as much as this people have removed their heart far from me, and seek to hide their work in the dark, and say, Who seeth us? therefore will I proceed to do a marvellous work among them, even a marvellous work, and a wonder—Howl ye, for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall be as destruction from the Almighty: Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every heart shall melt, and they shall be afraid: Pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be amazed one at another." How much more strange and marvellous will be the *future* punishment of despisers?—"God will perform a work which they would not believe, though a man should declare it to them." "Who knows the power of God's anger? As his fear is, so is his wrath." There is no passion in the human heart, more boundless than fear. This is prone to exaggerate evil. It often far exceeds the magnitude of its object. But, in this case, it is incapable of excess; it falls far short of that, which the wrath of God can do, and which, the scripture tells us, it will do.

We cannot conceive the misery which must attend a *total deprivation* of every enjoyment. Many have known the pains of poverty, sickness, captivity and slavery. Their pains, however, by a kindly intermixture of blessings, have been greatly mitigated and softened. The want of every comfort they never have experienced. But this is what contemptuous sinners will, one day feel. They have their portion of good things only in this life. Hereafter they will be tormented, and will have no rest day nor night. The rich man, tormented in flames, was denied the small request, that the beggar might be sent to cool his tongue, by touching it only with his finger dipped in water.

We cannot conceive the greatest anguish of a *self condemning conscience.*

Some indeed, have known this to a painful degree. Cain under the horrors of guilt, anticipated a punishment greater than he could bear. Judas, tormented with the stings of remorse, chose strangling and death rather than life. If the terrors of conscience may, even in this world, be so intolerable, What will they be in those regions of darkness, those gloomy and dismal shades, where peace and hope can never enter? There sinners will meet with nothing to divert their pensive minds. There all the past scenes of their lives, their contempt of offered mercy, and abuse of divine grace, all their ungodly deeds, and hard and impious speeches, will come full and fresh to their remembrance and perpetually haunt their guilty souls. Can it be imagined, what keen reflections will pierce them through and through?—What anguish will wring their hearts under the corrosions of the worm which never dies?

Sinners cannot, at present, have a full idea of that *positive* punishment, which awaits them.

Many have known severe pains from diseases, wounds and broken limbs. But these will give no adequate conception of that torment, which the scripture expresses by the fire which shall never be quenched.

The distress of *total despair* is beyond all imagination.

Under our greatest worldly afflictions, hope stands by to console and sustain us. Without this, some of our troubles would be insupportable. The apprehension of future misery has driven some to the borders of distraction; and yet, in their gloomiest hours hope has shed some sparks of light around them. But in the world of misery, despair will be perfect. Every gleam of hope will be excluded.

There will be " utter darkness," and this rendered more hideous by universal wailing and gnashing of teeth.

We can form no full and clear conception of *eternity.* This is an object too big for our comprehension. We can add, years to years, and ages to ages, until we lose ourselves in numbers; but our calculation, after all, stops infinitely short of eternity. Yet this is the duration of the future punishment of the ungodly. Amazing thought! Who can dwell with devouring fire? Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?

Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish!

3. This expression teaches us, that the punishment of those who despise the gospel, will be wonderful, *compared* with that of *other sinners.* They will be distinguished in the world of misery.

Moses having enumerated the singular privileges, which God had vouchsafed to his favoured people, says to them, " If ye will not observe to do all the words of this law, the Lord will make your plagues wonderful."

The gospel abounds in warnings of this kind. " If the word spoken by angels was stedfast," says the Apostle to the Hebrews, " and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward—How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"—" He who despised Moses's law, died without mercy: Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the son of God?"—" If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth a fearful looking for of judgment."—" If they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth; much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven." The Apostle Peter, to guard christians against apostasy, holds up the same warning—" It

had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them." Remarkable are the words of our Saviour to his Apostles, when he sent them forth to preach the kingdom of heaven—"Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words; when ye depart out of that house, or city, shake off the dust of your feet: verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorra in the day of judgment, than for that city." These words deserve particular attention.

The people of Sodom and Gomorra are set forth, as an example, suffering the vengeance of fire from heaven. But though they suffered a strange punishment in this world, they are still reserved unto judgment, for a severer doom. And yet their punishment, after all, will be far more tolerable, than the punishment of those who despise the gospel. Our Lord does not say, Whosoever shall practise all the *enormities* of Sodom; but, "whosoever shall not *hear your words*;" it shall be more tolerable for the men of Sodom, than for him. Despisers then will perish wonderfully, in a manner, which they would not believe, though one should declare it to them.

It is time now, that we proceed, as was proposed,

III. To urge and enforce the caution in the text—"Beware, lest this come upon you."

In mercy to our guilty world, God has sent down his Son from heaven, to make the purchase, proclaim the offers, and state the terms of eternal salvation. To us the word of this salvation is sent. The question now proposed is, Will you accept it?

If you will accept the benefit, you must submit to the terms of it. You must repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. You

must put off the old man with his deeds, be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which is created after the image of God. You must renounce all confidence in the flesh, and place your dependence on the righteousness of the Redeemer, as the ground of your justification to eternal life. You must form your holy resolutions in a humble reliance on the grace of the divine spirit, without which you can do nothing. In a word, you must, with a serious and deliberate choice, yield yourselves to the government of the gospel of Christ. If you will not do this, you despise his gospel, and all the blessings which it reveals. And whatever may be the condition of those, who have never heard of it, your contempt must certainly be followed with consequences, awful beyond description.

Consider, I beseech you, what it is that you despise. It is a gospel preached by the Son of God from heaven; confirmed by signs, and wonders and divers miracles, preserved in the world by a merciful providence, and transmitted to you by peculiar favour. How worthy then of your thankful acceptation!

To despise this, is to despise that pearl of great price, to purchase which you should be willing to sell all that you have. Its doctrines are heavenly, its precepts are pure, its promises are precious, it contains the unsearchable riches of Christ; treasures of wisdom and grace, which angels contemplate with admiration.

To despise this, is to despise God's greatest gift, even the gift of his own Son, who came to seek and to save them who were lost. It is to despise his distinguishing goodness, in revealing to you the things which are hidden from multitudes of your fellow men, and which many prophets and righteous men have desired to see. It is to despise your own souls, which, in the estimation of the Re-

deemer, are so precious, that he gave himself up to death for their salvation. It is to despise the spirit of grace, which has often strove with you, to awaken you from stupidity, recover you from unbelief, and draw you to the Saviour.

Judge now, what must be the consequence of this contempt. Know ye, that your judgment lingers not. The Lord will soon arise, that he may do his work, his strange work; and may finish his act, his strange act. He will sweep away your refuge of lies, and destroy all your hiding places. Now, therefore, be ye not mockers, lest this which is spoken, come upon you.

Enquire whether you are not to be numbered among those who are called despisers. You do not, perhaps, directly disbelieve, or professedly reject any essential doctrine of the gospel; much less the gospel itself. You receive and acknowledge it as true. But does this employ your thoughts, engage your attention, influence your heart, and govern your conduct? Is it your great concern to secure the salvation, which it reveals; and your serious enquiry, whether you have any lot or part in this matter; Do you give all diligence to make your calling and election sure? Are you willing to renounce every thing, which appears inconsistent with your eternal hopes? Do you love the word, worship and ordinances of God, and delight to attend upon them as the means of salvation?——Must not many confess, that they come short of this character? Yea, that their character is the reverse of this?——Let me particularly expostulate with the young. Are there not among you, some who think little about religion, and the vast concerns of eternity, and who devote themselves wholly to the pleasures, amusements and vanities of the world?—Some, who spend few of their private hours in conversing with the scrip-

tures, maintain no secret communion with God, and pay no reverence to the worship of the sanctuary ?——Some, who can stand out a whole prayer, or sit out a whole sermon, and yet scarcely know what has been spoken; and are more inattentive, when the concerns of their salvation are urged, than if they were hearing a novel or romance ?—Some, who seldom look into themselves to learn the state of their souls, rarely ask advice on their spiritual concerns, and love no conversation less, than that which turns on serious subjects ?—Do we see you, my young hearers, giving yourselves up to Jesus your Lord, and making an open profession of his gospel ? Do we see you flocking into his church, and gathering around his table ? Do we see you animating and encouraging one another to piety and good works ?——Can it be said, that among you, even among you, there are none who despise the Saviour ?

Will a gracious God pour his spirit upon our seed, and his blessing upon our offspring, that they may spring up as grass under the vernal showers, and as willows by the water courses ? Then shall we hear one saying, I am the Lord's, and another calling himself by the name of Jacob: We shall see them subscribing with their hands to the Lord, and enrolling themselves among his people: We shall behold them flying unto Jesus as a cloud, and gathering into his house, as doves to their windows.

The gospel is too great, too precious to be despised. It contains the words of eternal life: Hear it, and know it for your good.

Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, lest, while ye look for light he turn it into darkness and the shadow of death.

SERMON VIII.

The Cure and Conversion of Naaman, the Syrian Leper.

II. KINGS, v. 13.

And his servants came near and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, Wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?

NAAMAN, the chief commander of the Syrian army, a man of great reputation in his country, and in high estimation with his king, was grievously afflicted with the leprosy: a disease, which seemed in its nature to be incurable, and which by its progress in the present case, threatened speedy death. On the advice of a Hebrew girl, who was a servant in his family, the Syrian general took a journey into the land of Israel, hoping, from her information, to receive a cure by the power and prayers of the prophet Elisha. He came, with horses and chariots and a train of attendants, to the prophet's house, and waited at the gate, until his

person and business were made known, expecting that the man of God would soon appear, and with great solemnity perform the cure. But the prophet only sent to him a servant, with this simple prescription, "Go, wash seven times in Jordan, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." The general thinking his dignity contemned, and his misfortune insulted by a ridiculous prescription, indignantly replied, "Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?—May I not wash in them and be clean?—" So he turned and went away in a rage." His servants, reluctant to think that their hopes should be frustrated by his passionate resolution, expostulated with him, in the words, which have just been read. "My father, if the prophet had bidden thee do some great thing, Wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?" Their judicious expostulation recalled his reason. He applied the remedy, and obtained a cure. He immediately returned to the prophet, acknowledged the Supreme God, and professed his resolution to worship, from that time, no other deity, but the God of Israel.

This story will afford us several useful instructions.

I. We see the dangerous consequences of a hasty judgment in matters of importance.

This had like to have proved fatal to Naaman. It has often proved fatal to others. He conducted with much discretion, until he had heard the prophet's advice. At this critical moment his prudence deserted him. He turned away in anger; and, if his passion had continued, he would have been a leper to the day of his death. From his rashness

and precipitance, let others learn wisdom and caution.

"Judge not according to the appearance," says our divine Lord, "but judge righteous judgment."

Let this rule guide your enquiries concerning the doctrines of religion. Reject not a doctrine, because it contradicts an opinion, which once you have formed, or opposes a design which now you are pursuing; but examine it coolly, and decide upon it impartially. If it appears, to be a doctrine agreeable to reason, founded in scripture, and tending to virtue, admit it as divine, however diverse it may be from your former conceptions, or present inclinations.

When you meet with an unexpected reproof, suffer not your resentments to rise; but hear it calmly and apply it seriously. If you are not too good to offend, think not yourself too great to be admonished. "Let the righteous smite you; it will be a kindness: Let him reprove you; it will be an excellent oil, which shall not break your head." If you proudly presume that you have done no wrong, or, rashly deem him your enemy who reminds you of the wrong you have done, you are hardly capable of amendment. "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit;—there is more hope of a fool, than of him."

In the progress of the religious life, difficulties, unforeseen and unthought of, will probably occur. But how great soever they may be, hold on your way with constancy. You have felt a conviction of the importance of religion, and formed a resolution in its favour. You now attend on the appointed means of grace—you refrain from some of your past guilty practices—you seek God's mercy with an earnestness, which is new and unexperienced. Hopeful beginnings these. "Then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord." When the

leper of Syria came and waited at Elisha's door, there was a fair prospect of his recovery. Do not like him turn back in disgust. Perhaps you will not find the easy success, which you expected. Still wait on God, and maintain your hope. Say not, with the hypocrites of old, "It is vain to serve the Lord; and, What profit is it, that we walk mournfully before him?" he has not said to you, "Seek me in vain."

What a hopeful disposition appeared in the young ruler mentioned by the evangelist? He came to Christ, and enquired, how he should enter into life. He treated his divine instructor with reverence. The advice first given him he received with approbation, professed a compliance, and asked, What more was to be done? Alas! How many are there, who never appear to go as far in religion as he did? But still, unhappy youth! he failed. When he heard, that a temper to renounce the world for heaven, was necessary to complete the religious character, he went away; not indeed, like the Syrian in a rage; but in sorrow, that religion would not comport with the love of riches.

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling: Wait on God, and he will strengthen your heart. Look well to yourselves, that ye lose not the things, which have been wrought, but that ye receive a full reward.

II. We are here taught, that we are not to make our own humour the standard by which to form our judgment in matters of divine appointment.

This was Naaman's fault. If the prophet had come out to him, and, with the affected solemnity of a heathen inchanter, had invoked his God, and struck his hand over the distempered part, the leper would have expected a cure. But the simple advice to wash in Jordan, appeared too ridiculous to be regarded. His servants prudently suggest to

him, that this was the advice of an acknowledged *prophet;* and the propriety of it ought not to be disputed, even though it had been attended with the greatest difficulty.

The temper of Naaman has often appeared in others.

The Jews groaned for deliverance from Egypt; and deliverance was granted. But because they were not led right on, by the shortest passage, to Canaan, they murmured against Moses, and against God, and wished themselves in their former bondage.

At the time of Christ's appearance, the people were in earnest expectation of their Messiah; but, because he appeared in a form different from that which their own fancy had described, they rejected him as an impostor; nor could they by all his reasoning and miracles, be convinced, that they had misunderstood the prophets.

Among the Gentiles, Christ crucified for the salvation of men was foolishness; For how should he save others, who himself suffered as a criminal? The plain and artless manner in which the apostles preached, disgusted their pride. They imagined, it would have been far more agreeable to the wisdom of God to employ, in reforming the world, some acute philosopher and subtile disputer. Thus, carried away with their own humour and prejudice, many despised the gospel of salvation.

In the christian world, the religion of Jesus, which, in its original institution, is rational and pure, has been cruelly tortured and deformed by the vain conceits of men. For some it is too simple, and they think it would be much beautified and improved by the addition of a few more ceremonies. Others can hardly be reconciled to the few ceremonies which really belong to it. The precept concerning the sabbath, they choose to throw among

the obsolete rites of Judaism; for they see no reason for recess from labour, or application to the duties of piety, on one day more than another. They apprehend no advantage from a stated attendance on publick worship; for they can pray, and read the Bible, in private; and, if more is necessary, they can supply themselves with books well adapted to piety. They conceive not, what good it can do to apply a little water to a person's body, especially to the body of a child, with the invocation of a sacred name. The child knows not what is done; much less for what end it is done. Is salvation at all connected with such ceremonies?—They imagine there can be no real benefit in eating bread and drinking wine for the remembrance of Christ: May he not as well be remembered by reading the history of his life and death?

By cavils, like these, many satisfy themselves in the neglect of the plainest institutions of the gospel; just as the Syrian leper, when he was ordered to wash in Jordan, objected, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?—May I not wash in them and be clean?

The same humour often opposes the *doctrines*, as well as institutions of God. Some hastily reject every doctrine, which contradicts their own temper and practice; as if nothing could be true, but what will justify them. Some pronounce every doctrine false or useless, which comes not within their comprehension; as if a doctrine too grand for the human mind to grasp, might not be so far understood, as to influence an honest heart. Some make light of every thing in scripture, for which they cannot assign a reason; as if there could be no reasons for God's appointments, but what lie obvious to them. So Naaman rejected Elisha's advice, because he could see no reason, why the waters of

Jordan should be more efficacious in the leprosy, than those of any other river.

His servants have suggested the proper temper in such cases, which is submission to the authority of God. A *prophet* had bidden him wash in Jordan.

When a revelation is proposed to us, we are to examine its evidence; and with such evidence as appears rationally conclusive we are to rest satisfied. Whatever difficulties may arise from the imperfection of human reason, these should not be considered as invalidating positive proof. Settled in the full belief of revelation, we are to receive, as divine, every doctrine and precept which we find in it, and to govern our lives by them.

This leads us to another observation;

III. If we expect success in any great and good design, we must humbly follow the instructions of God. When Naaman washed in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God, his flesh came again, and he was clean.

God could have cleansed this leper by one washing as well as seven, or without sending him to Jordan at all. But he saw fit to make this prescription, and Naaman must obey.

He who made the earth, and placed us upon it, could command it to yield us a spontaneous supply. But then, What would be the use of those active powers, which he has given us? If we were supported, like trees and plants, merely by a mechanical nutrition, there would be a manifest incongruity in the works of God. Our powers would be unemployed; we should sink into thoughtless ingratitude: We should forget our benefactor and despise his benefits.

In common life, we see our dependance on God, and the importance of applying the powers which we possess. The case is the same in the religious life. By grace we are saved; and, by attendance on

means, we obtain this grace. You will ask, "Cannot God renew the hearts of sinners without their application of means?"—Grant that he can: Yet, since he has prescribed this, they are to expect his grace only in this way.

"But will God hear the prayers of the unconverted?" Why not? He has directed them to enquire of him, and he has not said to them, "Seek ye me in vain." You will say, "There is no real holiness in their prayers; they are made only from *natural* principles." It is granted: But God hears the ravens when they cry. May he not hear the voice of nature in rational, as well as in animal creatures?

When Israel, in their affliction, sought God, and returned and enquired early after him, he, being full of compassion, suspended their destruction, and prolonged their space of repentance, though their heart was not right with him, and they were not stedfast in his covenant.

You will ask, What peculiar benefit can arise from attending on publick institutions? Why may we not read and meditate, with as much profit, in private? Do the latter, and leave not the former undone.

"But is God dependent on a particular set of means?" If he is not dependent, yet you are. And if, under pretence of exalting his free and sovereign grace, you neglect the instituted means of religion, you mock the grace which you profess to magnify.

To proceed;

IV. If, in a case of importance, we would use difficult and doubtful means, rather than abandon the object in view, much more should we apply cheap and easy means, when we have good hope of success.

Naaman's case was extremely unhappy. Afflicted with an increasing disease, for which no remedy

was known, he had nothing to expect but death. What would he not give, to obtain a cure?

He had taken a journey to the land of Israel. He had brought with him ten changes of raiment, as many talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, as a present to the man, who should heal him. Almighty present; but not greater than he would give for his health. Besides this; had the prophet prescribed the most painful operations and expensive medicines, Naaman would have submitted to them, even without the positive assurance of a cure. How much more reasonable was it, that he should go and wash in Jordan, when he had a promise from the man of God, that his flesh should come again and he should be clean?

This argument his servants urged with great propriety, and it had its effect. To the case of sinners it may be applied with superior force.

Convinced of your guilty state, let this be your serious enquiry; What must we do to be saved?" Your salvation indeed comes from God. But it comes only in a way of repentance. Without this, it will be as absurd to expect the salvation of the gospel, as for Naaman to have hoped for a cure, while he refused the waters of Jordan. When so vast an object is depending, if God had bidden you to do some great thing, Would you not have done it? How much rather, when he says to you, "Repent and be saved?"

Had a life of the most painful self denial been made the condition of your eternal happiness, reason would dictate a compliance with it. How much more ought you to comply with the terms, which are in fact proposed! These are all mild and gracious. They are attended with no arbitrary mortifications. The religion, which prepares you for heaven, contributes to your happiness here. It will relieve you from the vexation of irregular pas-

sions, and the torments of conscious guilt. It will reclaim you from the way of transgressors, which is hard, and direct your feet in paths of pleasantness and peace. It will give order to your soul, and tranquillity to your conscience. It will open to you the most delightful prospect, and fill you with joyful hopes. It cannot, indeed, secure you from the outward troubles which result from a state of mortality; but it will yield you the firmest support, and the sweetest consolation under them.

If religion deprived you of all the blessings, and involved you in all the evils of the present world; yet, since it is necessary to the happiness of the next, it surely ought to be your choice: How much more when it unites the interests of both worlds?

Farther. Though God had only prescribed the means, and stated the terms of salvation, you ought, in a case of such mighty importance, to attend to them: How much more when a *promise* is annexed? If a patient, in dangerous sickness, should refuse all medicines, because their success was uncertain, we should conclude that his distemper had disturbed his reason. When life is depending, rather than submit to certain death we try precarious remedies.

The Ninevites, being warned of approching destruction, cried mightily unto God, and turned from their evil ways; "for," said they, "Who can tell, if God will turn from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" Had you no more ground of hope than they, yet you ought, like them, to apply the means of preservation: How much more, when God has assured you, that whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy?

Naaman's hope was reasonable. It stood, however, on more precarious ground than yours.

He had heard of the prophet Elisha, and of great things which he had done. But his first information came from a Hebrew child in his family. If Elisha was endued with extraordinary powers, it appeared not, how far these powers extended. He never had been known, either by water, or any other means, to heal a leper, though there were, among his own countrymen, patients enough, on whom he might have tried his power. These circumstances naturally rendered doubtful the issue of the proposed expedient. His servants, however, judged it wise to make a trial; and they judged right.

Your hopes rest on firmer ground. You receive your directions from the sacred scriptures, which are proved, by the highest evidence, to be the word of God. The means prescribed in your case, you know, come from divine authority. In the use of them many have found success. You are not the first who have been advised to apply them. They have, in every age, been blessed to the salvation of thousands. You are not called to make a doubtful experiment: But to use an approved remedy. What think you?—Did Naaman's servants reason well?—Say then, What can excuse your negligence, to whom their reasoning more strongly applies?

V. There is one thing more to be remarked in this story; namely, the benefits which Naaman received by his compliance with the good advice of his servants. These were restoration to health, and conversion to the truth. "Then he went and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God, and his flesh came again, as the flesh of a child."

Though he was a man of high spirits and hasty passion, there seems to have been a noble honesty in his disposition. He could take advice from his servants; and feel the force of an argument, even when it condemned himself.

They addressed him with tokens of respect. They did not bluntly rebuke him, but modestly expostulated with him. To reprove the faults and expose the errors of our friends, of our superiors—especially, if they be men of hasty tempers, is a delicate office. We must approach them cautiously, and touch them softly. We must choose out acceptable words; for these are the most forceable. It is better gently to insinuate, than roughly to obtrude our advice. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver."

We should always be open to the counsel of our friends; hear it with calmness, when it is offered; examine it with fairness, when we have heard it; and follow it as far as we are convinced it is just. He who feels too self important to be advised to his duty, is hardly capable of being reclaimed from his faults. A passionate temper exposes men to a thousand mischiefs. This temper, joined with pride, obstinacy and ignorance, is fatal. Naaman repented of his rashness. He tried the remedy, and received a cure.

This was not the greatest benefit which he found in complying with the prophet's advice. Convinced by his miraculous cure, that Jehovah was the only true God, he returned to the man of God, and said, "Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; I will henceforth offer neither burnt offering, nor sacrifice unto any other gods but the Lord."

By this journey to the land of Israel, he obtained a cure of his idolatry, as well as of his leprosy. Surely he did not regret his labour.

Men's interest often turns on circumstances, which seem trivial, and from which they had little expectation. Naaman brought with him his servants, not for counsel, but attendance: But their advice was the occasion of his being healed of his disease, and reclaimed from his error. Had they

not interposed, he would probably have returned home in his passion, and carried his leprosy and idolatry with him. We may often see the wisdom and goodness of providence, in things, which, at first view, seemed small and inconsiderable. Our life, our virtue, our deliverance from danger, and our security from temptation, may depend on occurrences, which seem to us quite indifferent. God can overrule the smallest circumstances to the most important issue.

It is a mighty advantage to have those about us, who have more virtue and discretion than ourselves. He who walks with wise men, will be wise.

The leprosy of Naaman's body was the occasion which brought him to the knowledge and belief of the true religion. The greatest evils, which we suffer in life, may, in the hand of providence, become the means of our greatest good. This consideration should teach us submission to the ways of God. Affliction, much oftener than prosperity, is the means of virtue. By captivity Manasseh was awakened to repentance. By a famine the prodigal was brought to himself. Most men, who have been reclaimed from a vicious life, may, I believe, date the first beginning of serious consideration from a dangerous sickness, a grievous disappointment, the death of an intimate friend, or some other painful trial. Many have seen cause to bless God for the things, which once they thought were against them.

It may seem perhaps, from the following part of this story, that Naaman was but a partial convert to the worship of God. He says to the prophet, "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." Some have, from hence,

supposed, that he intended still to worship the gods of his country, lest he should forfeit his high office under the king. But the prophet's answer, favours not this supposition. He says, "Go in peace."

Naaman had resolved to worship no other god, but the Lord; and as an open testimony of his faith in him, to build him an altar in Damascus, with materials carried from the land of Israel. His office, however, under the king, required his attendance in the temple of Rimmon, whenever his master went thither to worship; and when the king, leaning on his shoulder, should bow in the temple he must unavoidably bow with him. Now he enquires of the prophet, whether such an involuntary action, after he had given publick proof of his faith in the God of Israel, would be matter of offence. He seems to hope, it might be dispensed with, and he need not resign his office. The prophet says, "Go in peace." Civil respect to your king is not inconsistent with the worship of God.

True religion is pure and uncorrupt. It is directed to the one supreme God. It consists in loving and serving him with an undivided heart. But it dissolves not our natural, or civil relations, nor cancels the obligations which result from them: It only requires us to perform the duties of these relations with simplicity and sincerity, as to God, and not men. If Naaman in order to retain his office, had determined to worship the idols of his country, vain and unacceptable would have been his sacrifices to the God of Israel. But if he made open declaration of his abhorrence of the Syrian idolatry, and only attended on the king in compliance with the civil duties of his station, the prophet signifies, that he might be accepted.

New converts are to be treated with tenderness. Too rigorous impositions may discourage hopeful beginnings. Our Saviour would not put new wine

into old bottles, lest the bottles should burst, and the wine be spilled.

The conversion of so respectable an officer in the Syrian nation might produce happy consequences to others. The altar which he erected, and the worship which he paid, in his own country, to the one supreme God, might be the occasion of reclaiming many from their idolatry. Great and important effects are often produced from small beginnings. The reformation of one sinner may eventually prove the salvation of thousands. Paul obtained mercy, that in him Christ might shew forth all long suffering for a pattern to them, who should afterward believe to life everlasting.

God has wonderful ways in bringing about his merciful purposes to men. He often makes a small circumstance productive of mighty events, and turns a worldly calamity into an eternal blessing. We should learn to regard his hand in all our changes, to trust his wisdom in all our perplexities, to trace the ways of his providence in their wonderful connexions, to improve our worldly afflictions for the advancement of religion in our hearts, and to exhibit before men such a bright example of good works, that they also may glorify God.

SERMON IX.

The first Fruits unto Christ.

ROMANS, xvi. 5.

Salute my well beloved Epenetus, who is the first fruits of Achaia unto Christ.

PAUL in his salutations to his christian friends, mentions something in the character of almost every one, as a ground and reason of his affection and esteem. What he particularly commends in this Epenetus is, that *he was the first fruits of Achaia unto Christ.* Some copies read, the first fruits of *Asia*, which reading some think should be preferred, because the Apostle says, 1 Cor. xvi, 15. that the *house of Stephanas* was the fruits of *Achaia.* But perhaps *Epenetus* might be the first *person*, and the household of *Stephanas* the first *family*, in Achaia, which openly embraced the gospel. On this supposition the passages, as they stand, are fully reconciled.

The first fruits under the law, were an offering made to God of part of the harvest in acknowledgment of his bounty. This offering was made of the first ripe fruits, and before the harvest was

begun. In allusion to this offering, Jesus Christ is called, "the first fruits of them that slept," because he was the firstborn from the dead, and his resurrection is an earnest and pledge of the resurrection of believers.

The sanctifying and comforting influences of the spirit, which are now vouchsafed to christians, are called *the first fruits of the Spirit.* For as the first fruits were to the Jews pledges of the ensuing harvest, so the graces of the Spirit are tokens and earnests of heavenly happiness.

The Apostle James says, "God of his own will hath begotten us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures:" Or that we should be consecrated to his service; as the first fruits of harvest were dedicated to him, in acknowledgment that all was his gift.

In the fourteenth chapter of the Revelation, they who were redeemed from among men; they who in times of general corruption, had not defiled themselves, but preserved their purity; they who had followed the Lamb whither soever he went, are called "the first fruits unto God and the Lamb." These, like the firstborn and first fruits under the law, were dedicated to God; and their fidelity was an earnest of a more plentiful accession to the church of God in future times.

By a like allusion to the offering, which preceded the harvest, the Apostle calls the first converts to the faith of Christ in a particular place, the first fruits of that place unto Christ. They resembled the first fruits, not only in their early dedication of themselves to Christ, but also as their conversion was a mean and an earnest of a succeeding harvest there. You see then the special reason why Paul salutes Epenetus in those terms.

Now consider this man, dwelling in the midst of heathens and idolaters, surrounded with daily ex-

amples of vice and superstition, and long accustomed to the manners of the world; but, on the preaching of an Apostle of Christ, renouncing his former vices and errors; coming out from among a corrupt and idolatrous multitude; standing forth alone in the profession of the truth and the reformation of his life; and, by his example, and conversation, inviting his fellow citizens to turn from their vanities and serve the living God; and will you not admire his integrity, zeal and fortitude—His openness to conviction—The strength of his faith in Christ, and the benevolence of his heart toward those around him? Viewing Epenetus in this light, Will you wonder, that Paul remembers him in his christian salutations; calls him his beloved friend; and celebrates his virtue as *the first fruits of Achaia unto Christ*? In what an amiable and important light does he stand? What higher and nobler character could be given of him, than the Apostle has expressed in these few words?

We are here naturally led to this remark, *that forwardness in religion is a character highly commendable in the sight of Jesus Christ.* So our apostle esteemed it. He therefore ever speaks in terms of peculiar honour and affection, concerning those who first embraced the gospel in a particular place; who were in Christ before him; who ran great hazards in the cause of truth; who had been his helpers in the work of Christ; and who had labored much in the Lord.

Let us first shew how a forwardness in religion may discover itself. And then display the excellency and commendableness of this disposition.

We will first consider the disposition here commended in Epenetus: He was the *first fruits to Christ.* He distinguished himself by a promptitude, zeal and forwardness in the cause of the gospel.

There is, in some persons, a certain vanity—a self importance, which makes them forget their proper place, and urges them to take the lead in every matter in which they mean to bear a part. They assume haughty airs, and dictatorial language; feel superior to advice, and competent to prescribe to every man. They are swift to speak on every subject, and slow to hear on any. They are bold and confident in their own opinions; fixed and obstinate in their own resolutions; and liberal in their censures of all who dissent from them.

This is *forwardness* indeed; but not forwardness in *religion.* True religion is always attended with humility; with sober thoughts of ourselves; with a charitable disposition to others; with a modest distrust of our own wisdom, strength, and virtue; and with a ready attention to the instructions and councils of those, who may be our helpers in Christ Jesus. Paul, though the chief of the Apostles, thankfully accepted assistance in his work from private Christians; even from those who had been converted by his ministry.

While we aim to be forward in religion, let us avoid every thing that savours of pride and ostentation. This, so far as it prevails, is inconsistent with religion in ourselves, and so far as it appears, will defeat our endeavours to promote religion among others. Particularly,

1. *Early religion* may be called the first fruits unto Christ. It discovers an amiable forwardness to serve him. Epenetus was not called by the gospel in his youth: He enjoyed not those early advantages, which many now enjoy. But it seems probable, that he embraced the first opportunity to hear the gospel, and accepted the first invitation to devote himself to Christ. His religion had all the virtue and excellency of early religion. He gave to Christ the first fruits, if not of life itself, yet of

that part of life in which he was favoured with the heavenly call.

All have now this call in their youth. They, who are most forward and seasonable in obeying it, are the first fruits to Christ. They give him their purest and best time, as an earnest that all shall be consecrated to him.

You, who are young, are from the very circumstance of your age, tempted to delay the work of religion. Many of you appear to live with great indifference to it. By your example you embolden one another in the dangerous neglect. Now, if any of you, awakened to a sense of your danger, should renounce the vanities of your youth, and dedicate yourselves to the service of your redeemer, you would be to him the first fruits among your fellows. And who knows, what a harvest might ensue? Your example may encourage others; your early zeal might provoke many. But still you would be entitled to the distinction of being in Christ before them.

2. Forwardness in religion will appear in an *open profession* of it, and a diligent attendance on the means of it.

There may be a profession of religion, when the heart is not engaged in it. But a zeal for religion, without a profession, cannot be supposed; for a profession is not only injoined as a duty in itself, but prescribed as a mean of promoting religion among others. The man who really believes the gospel of Christ, and feels the vast importance of it, will openly declare before men the views and apprehensions, which he entertains of it. The apostle says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to every one that believes." The believer will wish the prevalence of religion among others. That a dispensation, on which the eternal happiness of guilty men so essen-

tially depends, should be generally neglected and disregarded, is a thought which deeply wounds the benevolent feelings of his soul. As he desires that others should have the same sentiments of it with him, so he openly avows his regard to it; and by a diligent attendance on the instituted ordinances of it, invites all to come and seek an acquaintance with it, and share in its divine and heavenly blessings.

3. One who is forward in religion, will maintain the profession and practice of it, though he should thus render himself *singular*.

Epenetus professed the religion of the gospel, when all around him were in a different sentiment and practice. He was the first, among all the people in Achaia, to stand forth in its cause. Stephanas was the first there, who dedicated his whole family to Christ, and set up the worship of God in his house. What a noble zeal and fortitude they discovered, in adventuring to be singular in the faith and obedience of the gospel?

The christian, who is forward and zealous in religion, will profess it, though his neighbours treat it with indifference. He will maintain the worship of God in his family, though all around him despise and even redicule his strict and conscientious devotion. The cavillers at family worship, he answers in the language of the captain of Israel, "If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom you *will* serve; but as for me and my house, *we* will serve the Lord."

He will attend on the instituted ordinances of God's house, and require the attendance of his children with him, though the manner of others is to forsake the assembling of themselves together.

He will have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but will rather reprove them. He will be the companion of them who fear God,

and will say to evil doers, depart from me, though they may think it strange that he runs not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of him.

He will not be conformed to this world; but, being transformed by the renewing of his mind, he proves what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

In matters of a worldly nature, he will use great condescension for the sake of peace. But in religion he will be governed, not by the opinions and customs of the world, but by the plain instructions of God's word. He is peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated; but he is first pure. He reckons it a small thing to be judged of man's judgment, since he who will judge him is the Lord. And though he is disposed, in matters of indifference, to please men for their good to edification, yet he will not please them with the hazard of offending God. An aim to please God is the grand principle that governs him in all his conversation. This leads me to say.

4. Forwardness in religion must appear in a zeal for *great* and *essential* things.

There are many who are forward in little matters; zealous for or against speculative opinions, outward forms, and the peculiar tenets and usages which discriminate particular sects. But this is not forwardness in religion; it is only forwardness in a party design. This is not to offer to Christ the first fruits of obedience. It is rather to offer him the straw and chaff, instead of the full laden sheaf.

The christian, forward in religion, principally regards the substantial and weighty matters of the gospel. He is zealous to repent and to maintain good works. He is fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. He abounds in the proper fruits of the spirit, righteousness, goodness and truth. His heart is set in him against sin of every kind, especially against his own sins; and engaged in the great

and unquestionable duties of the gospel. He gives deligence to make his calling and election sûre, by continual improvements in all the graces of the christian temper. He is solicitous to abound in them, that he may never fall, but an entrance may be ministered to him abundantly into the kingdom of Christ.

5. One who is forward in religion, labours to promote it *among others.*

When Paul calls his beloved Epenetus the first fruits of Achaia to Christ, he intimates that a rich harvest followed; for the first fruits imply a following harvest. This forward christian doubtless assisted Paul in his work, and contributed his aid in the culture of the soil, and in the production and collection of the crop. His conversion to the faith, and his exemplary conversation, were among the means which gave the gospel a successful spread in Achaia

The forward christian will principally attend to the state of religion in his own soul. He will not neglect his own vineyard, to keep the vineyards of his brethren. He will not be officious to wipe the mote out of his brother's eye, while a beam is in his own. He will not spend his zeal in censuring the sins of others, and indulge iniquity in his own heart. His first care is to cleanse himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

He next attends to the state of religion in his family. He commands his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord. He is watchful over their manners, that he may restrain them from making themselves vile, and from rendering others so by their vile example.

But his influence is not confined within the walls of his own dwelling; it extends to those around. He laments the prevalence of iniquity, and the decline of religion, wherever he observes it. He

prays that God would revive his work, and studies how he may be instrumental in advancing it.

He readily concurs in any reasonable measures for this purpose. As the preaching of the gospel is an instituted mean of religion, he honours it by his attendance, gives credit to it by his example, and, when there is opportunity, seconds it by his advice and reproof.

They who fear God will speak often one to another in a way of consultation, what they ought to do for the Lord, when men make void his statutes. If they see a proper occasion, they will cheerfully impart their substance for the relief of their necessitous brethren, for the support of Christ's cause, and for the assistance of such as are under any peculiar disadvantages with respect to religion. Such was the zeal of the primitive christians. The house of Stephanas, which was the first fruits of Achaia, addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints. Paul commends to the Corinthians the forwardness of the christians in Macedonia, whose deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality; and who, even beyond their power, were willing of themselves, without solicitation, to contribute to the relief of their distressed brethren in Judea. And the forwardness of the Corinthians he also commends in the following terms—"It is superfluous for me to write to you concerning the ministering to the saints; for I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia—and your zeal hath provoked very many."

The forwardness of religious zeal among christians can be displayed in nothing more substantially, than in their liberal minds toward each other.

6. The forward christian aspires to *greater eminence* in religion. He is not satisfied with what he is, nor contented with what he has done: He would grow in grace, and abound still more in all the

fruits of righteousness. He reckons not himself to be already perfect; but forgetting the things which are behind, he reaches forward to the things which are before, and presses toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ. The superior example of others humbles him for his defects, and animates his endeavours to equal their virtues. He would be enriched in every thing by Christ, so as to become behind his brethren in no gift, which may conduce to his eminence and usefulness in his christian sphere; and thus he waits for the coming of Jesus Christ, who, he trusts, will confirm him to the end, that he may be blameless in the day of Christ Jesus his Lord.

But I may no longer detain you on this branch of my subject. I proceed,

II. To shew the excellency and amiableness of this forwardness in religion.

Paul commends Epenetus and calls him his beloved, because he was the first fruits of Achaia to Christ. He boasts to the Corinthians concerning the forwardness of them in Macedonia, and to the latter concerning the forwardness of the Corinthians, in the common cause of Christ.

1. This forwardness is commendable as an evidence of sincerity. It shews the concurrence and engagedness of the heart. The hypocrite is slothful in business; or zealous only in some less important matters. One who is forward in the great concerns of religion, and maintains his fidelity to Christ, even when others despise or oppose his cause, gives substantial proof that his heart is right with God. He may find joy in the consciousness, that his conversation is in simplicity and godly sincerity.

2. This forwardness in religion is commendable on account of its usefulness.

The slothful, negligent christian emboldens sinners in their transgressions, and confirms them in their stupidity. If he sleeps as do others, he will lull them into a profounder sleep. But he who is forward in religion, not only reproves negligent christians, but condemns secure and thoughtless sinners. When Noah obeyed the divine warning, it is said, he condemned the world. The zeal of some in Corinth provoked very many. When a sinner awakes to repentance, and runs no longer with former companions to excess of riot, he warns them to repent and forsake the path of destruction. His engagedness in the work of salvation, admonishes them of its importance. When a youth yields himself to Christ, professes his gospel, and walks agreeably to it, his example invites his fellows to forsake the foolish and live, and to go in the way of understanding. A rich harvest ensued, when Epenetus had offered the first fruits to Christ. Should some of you, my young hearers, discover a warm but modest zeal in the work of Christ; and an active, but steady concern for your own salvation, you know not how many might be won by your example. While you are saving your own souls, you know not how many more might be saved by your means. While you are doing good to yourselves, you know not how much good you might do to others. How delightful would be the reflection to your own minds, that you had been the first fruits to Christ, and that your offering had been followed with a plenteous harvest? How much would it sweeten life to think, you were following Christ to glory, and, by your example, drawing others along in the same joyful path? How much will it add to the delights of heaven, to find, that your first fruits have been the means and occasion of gathering a harvest of sheaves into Christ's garner? Animated by such thoughts aud prospects, come,

engage in the service of Christ, and shew such diligence and forwardness in it, that your zeal may provoke very many.

3. This forwardness in religion is commendable, as it is honourable to Christ. To him belong the first fruits of your lives. You are redeemed by his death; you are bought with the price of his blood. Glorify him therefore in your body and spirit, which are his. Present yourselves holy to him. This is your reasonable service. How can you honour him, but by the dedication of yourselves to him? The more forward you are in his cause, the more honour you bring to his name. The earlier you begin to serve him, the greater service will you do him. The more active and diligent you are, the more influence your example will have on others.

Christ is honoured by the increase of his subjects. By your forwardness, you will contribute to this increase.

4. Forwardness in religion is commendable as an imitation of Christ.

He was, in early life, about his Father's business. He said, "I must work the works of him that sent me." It was his meat and drink to do God's will. He was forward on all occasions to promote the honour of God and the happiness of men. Fervent was his love to men's souls, and strong was his abhorrence of sin. He went about doing good. No dangers, not even death in its most dreadful form, could damp the ardour of his resolution. To him was applied the expression of the Psalmist. "The zeal of thine house hath consumed me." We are to learn zeal, as well as humility, of Jesus Christ. It is the Christians greatest honor and happiness to be like him.

5. This forwardness in religion is amiable and commendable, because it is in the highest degree rational. It is regarding things according to their

nature and importance. It is directing our zeal to the right object; and employing our activity in a matter of the highest moment, and most lasting consequence. How trifling are all the interests of this world, compared with the future? What is the body to the soul, and this momentary life to eternal duration? Religion is the means of our future and everlasting happiness. It is that on which our all depends. In what then should we be forward and zealous, if not in this? What shall we be diligent about, if we may neglect our salvation?

Finally; We have no promise of success on any other condition, but diligence in our work.

This is the command of Christ. Seek first the kingdom of God. Strive to enter in at the strait gate.

This is the direction of the Apostle. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you. Be not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you. Such is the constant language of scripture. Think not then, that you are to be saved in a way of negligence. The promise is only to those who give diligence to make their calling and election sure.

It is by forwardness in religion, that you become entitled to the constant aids of God's grace. God gives his holy spirit to them who ask, and seek and knock. He works in those who work out their own salvation. He bestows his blessing on those who pray with all prayer, and watch thereunto with all perseverance.

Let the united influence of these motives prompt us to zeal and activity in religion, excite the young to offer the first fruits, and all to offer the remaining fruits of their lives to God, that having our fruit unto holiness, our end may be eternal life.

SERMON X.

The Obscurity and Uncertainty of the way of the wicked.

PROVERBS, iv. 19.

The way of the wicked is as darkness: They know not at what they stumble.

THE *way of the wicked* is here contrasted to *the path of the just*. *This*, the wise man says, *is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

The virtuous and upright man walks in the light, and clearly discerns his way. He looks well to his goings, and shuns the evils which he foresees. If he is in doubt, he makes inquiry, and attends to the answer. His path grows plainer, the farther he advances; and smoother, the more it is trodden. An increasing pleasure invites him along, and a cheerful hope quickens his steps.

The reverse of this is the way of the ungodly. Their path is involved in darkness, and beset with snares. They see not what dangers await them,

nor into what mischiefs the next step may plunge them. They have no security where they are, and find none where they go. All around them is obscurity, and all before them is uncertainty.

Such is the way of the wicked; and in this respect, as well as many others, the way of transgressors is hard.

There can be no real self enjoyment without inward peace and conscious safety. A state of doubtful apprehension, in cases of importance, is a state of disquietude and uneasiness. To be suspended between hope and fear, is to hang in torture. And there are cases in which the anticipation of evil is as distressing as the evil itself, and suspense is as painful as to realize the worst.

We will consider the unhappy state of the wicked, in this respect, that it is a state of *insecurity* and *uncertainty.*

We will view the sinner in several different lights as believing the great principles of religion, but contradicting them in practice, as assuming an external form of religion without integrity of heart, as acknowledging the obligations of natural religion, but discarding revelation, and finally, as renouncing all religion, whether natural or revealed, both in theory and in pactice.

These several descriptions will comprehend all sorts of wicked men; and, in each of these views, we shall find them to be in a state of great uncertainty and insecurity; and therefore, in a state far remote from happiness.

1. We will consider the man, who admits the principles of religion in speculation, but contradicts them in practice. *His way is darkness.* Light, indeed, has come to him; but he loves darkness rather than light. He is not guided by the dictates of reason, or the precepts of revelation; but pursues a course in direct opposition to both. He professes

to believe the divine authority of the gospel but will not be subject to it. He acknowledges an eternal state of retribution; but conducts as if there were none. He complains of the vanity of the world; but in the world he seeks his happiness. He allows the important difference between moral good and evil; but in practice confounds the distinction. He does not walk by any steady rule, or follow any certain line of conduct; but is driven in various directions by the impulse of lust, passion and interest. He never knows what course he shall next pursue; for he cannot tell what the next impulse will be; what gust of passion will take him, or what wind of temptation will drive him away.

While the love of the world reigns in him supreme, he is exposed to every vice. No iniquity will he decline, which promises him success in his favorite pursuit. Determined on his object, he falls into temptation and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in perdition.

He knows, indeed that his course is dangerous: He intends to stop in season, and turn to the path of virtue. But vain is his purpose. The way before him is covered with darkness. He cannot see whither he is going, nor where he shall make a stand. He has wandered from the right way, and still he will love to wander.

The path of vice is full of windings. One devious tract leads on to another. The farther one proceeds, the more he is bewildered, and the more difficult and doubtful will be his recovery. Like the traveller, who has lost his way in the night, he is deceived by every distant light which appears, and misled by every new path which opens: The deep and dangerous morass he mistakes for a smooth and spacious plain: He deviates so far, and changes his course so often, that his head is turned,

and scarcely will he believe the friend who points out his homeward way.

It is the hope of future repentance, which reconciles the sinner at present, to his guilty course. But his hope is attended with great uncertainty. Every step in his progress increases the difficulty, and lessens the probability of his return. New temptations meet him to entice him along; and new embarrassments are thrown behind to obstruct his retreat. His way forward is down the hill; to return he must climb the precipice. By habit his mind becomes more inclined to evil, his imagination more fascinated to pleasure, and his conscience more callous to reproof. Long accustomed to procrastinate, he can procrastinate still, and do it with greater facility, and with less regret, than at first. The prospect of a future season and a better opportunity still flatters and beguiles him. That daily he is growing older, and death drawing nearer, he well knows; but never does he feel himself so old or infirm, but that he fancies he may hold out some time longer; and his intended repentance is limited within the time which he expects to live. Thus by repeated resolutions, and continued delays, he deadens a sense of religion, and becomes hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. In the mean time, he cannot tell, but the grace of God may withdraw its kindly influences, and the providence of God withhold its wonted protection; unexpected death may break his penitential purposes, or stupidity of conscience extinguish his serious sentiments.

Thus his way is dark and doubtful. He enters upon it without light, and walks in it without a guide. He knows not whither he shall wander, nor to what lengths he shall proceed; what temptations will decoy him, nor what snares will intangle him. He has departed from the way of peace, nor can he

be sure that he shall find it again. "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, he shall be holden in the cords of his sins; he shall die without instruction, and in the greatness of his folly, he shall go astray."

2. Let us consider the hypocrite, who, without integrity of heart, assumes the external form of religion. His way is *dark* and *slippery*.

He believes that there is such a thing as religion, and that it is a matter, in which he is really concerned. He views a future state as certain, and preparation for it as immediately important. He thinks of death as a change which is near, and which, whenever it comes, will place the sons of men in a state vastly different from this, in a state of endless happiness or woe. "His heart is, indeed, full of love to this world; but, since he must leave it, he wishes to have a good hope in the view of another. Death is a terror to him; but die he must; and he desires to die the death of the righteous, and like him to finish his days in peace. He is sure he should enjoy himself, and his earthly treasures much better, if he could only free his mind from this painful bondage to the fear of death—this troublesome apprehension of the wrath to come. He applies himself to obtain that easy and tranquil state, which seems so desirable. He has no more love to religion, than he used to have. Terror only has awakened him from his guilty slumbers. It is not the temper of godliness; it is only the pleasure of a good hope, which is the immediate object of his desire. Under the influence of this desire, he examines the nature of religion; but forms lax and partial notions of it: He attends, with diligence, to some religious duties; but chooses those which cost him little selfdenial: He avoids gross immoralities; but is not so scrupulous in smaller matters: He makes a good profession, and does as much as he

thinks necessary to support a fair character: Invited by some new appearance of zeal, and by a prospect of having his conversion soon sanctioned, he, perhaps, joins himself to a new sect: He there hears things spoken which flatter his spiritual pride: He magnifies his good works, and shuts his eyes against his evil ones; especially against the corruptions of his heart: He compares himself with some others, and fancies the comparison turns much to his advantage. So the Pharisee trusted that he was righteous, because he fasted often, abstained from adultery and extortion, and was not so vile as he thought a certain publican to be; selecting, for the comparison, a man whom he despised; though really a much better man than himself. Thus the hypocrite, partly by sinking the christian character below what it ought to be, and partly by exalting his own above what it really is, acquires a hope, that his future interest is secure.

But still his state is darkness. He gains his hope by selfdeception, and maintains it by selfflattery; not by an impartial examination of his heart and a distinct knowledge of his character. The hope which he obtains, is not the precious metal which brightens in the trial; it is a rotten substance, which shines only in the dark. Amidst his presumptuous confidence, there is usually a secret suspicion, that all within is not sound. There is a jealousy and distrust of himself. There is a consciousness of some partiality, precipitancy and unfairness in the judgment which he has made. His heart does not feel right. There is not that deep, calm, sensible pleasure, which accompanies godly sincerity, and pure, unaffected religion. The hope, which springs spontaneously from an honest and good heart, is substantial and satisfying. The laboured, artificial hope of the hypocrite, is hollow, empty and unsound. It will not bear the touch. Like the fruit

of Sodom, it looks fair to the eye, but when it is handled, it turns to smoke and ashes. The honest christian examines and proves himself, whether he is in the faith. He adopts the humble prayer of the Psalmist, "Search me, O God, and try my heart; see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." The hypocrite distrustful of his case, glides over it superficially. Like a man of suspicious worldly circumstances, he is afraid to look into his affairs and adjust his accounts, to compare his debts and credits, his means and expenses, lest he should find himself hastening to bankruptcy. A painful suspicion, now and then, intrudes itself and demands a reckoning; but he dismisses the intruder with fair promises, and consoles himself with new flatteries. Thus he passes through life in darkness and uncertainty. His hope springs from ignorance of himself and religion; it is attended with distrust and anxiety, and will issue in painful disappointment.

We proceed,

3. To consider the wicked man in another point of light; as believing the great truths of natural religion, but discarding revelation.

His way is covered with *darkness*. He has no light to direct his eye or guide his steps. With respect to the nature, condition and means of future happiness, an awful uncertainty attends him. There is no ground on which his faith can stand; no support on which his hope can lean.

He believes there is a God, a providence and a future life. He believes men are moral and accountable beings, who will hereafter be treated in some measure according to their characters. So much, he thinks, is taught by reason. But the gospel, considered as a revelation from God, he rejects as useless, and incredible. Its moral precepts he acknowledges to be good; but the doctrines of salva-

tion through a dying Saviour—of renovation by the influence of the Holy Spirit—of eternal life as a gift of sovereign grace—and of everlasting punishment as the wages of sin, and the desert of unbelief—these he will not receive, nor own the authority of the book which contains them. They are too opposite to his pride and selfconceit, to his worldly affections and fleshly lusts, to obtain a place in his creed.

Now what does this man gain by rejecting the gospel?—He only gives up the *hopes* of religion: He neither cancels its *obligations*, nor annihilates its *terrors*.

Every man, who has just sentiments of morality, must know, that he is under obligations to virtue; and every man who is acquainted with himself, must confess that he has, in many instances, violated these obligations, and therefore stands guilty before God; and every man, who has any rational apprehensions of the Deity, must acknowledge, that vice is contrary to his nature, and deserving of his wrath. If we set aside the gospel, yet it still remains a truth—a truth founded in the principles of reason and nature, that the sinner is exposed to punishment.

The gospel has not created any new danger, or contrived any new punishment, which without it would never have existed: But it has warned men of their real danger, and pointed out the way of deliverance. It teaches us, that God is rich in mercy to those who call upon him, that he will pardon and accept repenting sinners, how guilty soever they have been, that he will assist by his grace those who frame their ways to turn to him. Our hope in God's mercy it confirms by explicit promises, and especially by the discovery of a Saviour who died to take away the sin of the world.

If we reject this Saviour, to whom shall we go?—*If* we refuse the corner stone which God has laid, on what foundation shall we build?—Reason teaches us our obligations, and conscience owns that we have broken them. Our guilt and danger are undeniable. But where do we learn, that God will forgive, that he will accept of repentance, that on repentance he will pardon all sin, that his grace will abound unto eternal life, that he will give his holy Spirit to them who ask him?—These consoling truths, reason can never teach; we learn them only from the gospel. The man, therefore, who rejects this, walks in darkness. He has no light to guide him in the way of peace. He knows not whither he goes.

4. There is another view, which we are to take of the wicked. We will consider them as renouncing the great principles of natural religion, the existence and government of God, moral obligation, and a future retribution. There are some such infidels as these; but their way is covered with darkness, more gloomy and dismal than that which involves the path of other transgressors.

A thinking man—and such men pretend to think with superior freedom—a thinking man can have no settled peace, on any principles but those of religion; because on no other can he possess any kind of security. If we set aside the belief of a God, a providence, and a future existence, all before us is uncertainty and confusion, darkness, and horror.

Take an Atheist, and examine what source of light and comfort he can find.

He believes that when he dies there is an end of him; that this spark of intellect is extinguished, and will be kindled no more. On this belief, he pursues the pleasures of the world, as the only object worthy of his attention. "Let us eat and drink," says he, "for tomorrow we die."

But will this sentiment, even admitting it were true, cheer and brighten his passage through life? No; it will cover his path with darkness. How gloomy the thought, that this rational nature, this conscious mind, must be blotted out of creation, and utterly extinguished forever!

Annihilation, indeed, is not so horrible an event, as positive and perpetual misery: But still it is horrible; and no man will indulge the thought of it, unless it be, that he may thus relieve his mind from the fear of something worse.

Conscious of guilt, the sinner flies to this refuge for security: But perhaps this refuge will fail him.

Look around: Here is a mighty fabrick, a stupendous universe, which exhibits every mark of power, wisdom and design. This in some way or other, has come into existence. Certainly it does not look like the wanton sport of chance; but like the regular operation of a wise, benevolent, almighty Creator. If there is a God who made the world and placed men upon it, undoubtedly he observes and distinguishes their different actions; and it may justly be expected, that he will treat them accordingly.

The Atheist then, after all he can say, must view himself in a state of danger—after all his selfflattery, he must fear, that there is a day of reckoning at hand.

But even though he could be sure, that there is no God, or providence, and that the world, and all that belongs to it, are the effects of *chance* or *fate*, still, What security has he, that he shall not be miserable; yea, miserable in the extreme, and forever? If accident or necessity has thrown him into existence here, it may as well throw him into existence somewhere else; and in what condition he shall find himself at the next change, he cannot conjecture. It is at least an equal chance that when

the body is dissolved, he still shall live a conscious being: And, if he has an existence, this may as well be miserable as happy. If chance has subjected him to some misery in this state, perhaps it will handle him more rudely in the next. There is no knowing, what contingence or necessity may do; and no provision can be made against the caprice of the one, or the tyranny of the other.

The man, then, who disbelieves the existence and providence of a God, and the difference between moral good and evil, must be in a most gloomy and dismal state. His way is darkness. He has no security in any line of conduct, and he cannot conjecture what is before him in the confusion of events. Every thing bodes danger and threatens misery. There is no being to whom he can repair for help—no sanctuary to which he can retreat for safety. Even virtue is confounded, and prudence is nonplussed. Do what he will, he lies at the mercy of wild and wanton chance, or of cruel and inexorable fate. His forethought is blind, caution is useless, and prayer is vain. There is no security of good, nor remedy for evil. All around him is darkness, and all before him is horror.

Say now, Is this a desirable state?—A state for which a wise man would exchange the comforts of religion?

What peace and satisfaction can a mortal feel without a persuasion, that there is a wise, just and good Being, who made and governs the world, and that this Being is his friend?—That there is a way to obtain the protection and secure the favour of this Being, and that he has found and chosen the way?

With this persuasion he may possess a cheerful serenity amidst all the vicissitudes of life; for to the virtuous, God is a present help in trouble, and all things will he turn to their advantage. "God is

our refuge and strength," says the Psalmist; "therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, and though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."

A wise and thinking man, as he regards his own peace and happiness, will endeavour fully to understand what religion is, and on what ground it stands; what it requires him to be, and forbids him to do; what hopes and what fears it proposes, as motives to duty. When he has learnt what religion is, it will be his next concern to comply with its design and secure its blessings. And next to this, it will be his care to know his own character and condition, and to judge whether he may safely appropriate the promises of religion, or is still exposed to its threatenings.

Consider then, what beings you are. You have a rank assigned you in the intelligent creation. Look around, and behold plain evidences of the existence and government of a Deity. Realize your dependence on him and accountableness to him. Reflect on your important situation. You are on trial for eternal happiness. How precious then is every hour! Think of your advantages. To you God has committed his sacred oracles. Here, under a consciousness of your guilt, you may find hope and comfort. Here you may learn, that God is merciful to forgive the penitent, and to support their virtuous resolutions —that his salvation is dispensed to sinners, through the righteousness of his son, and that it is unto all, and upon all them who believe in this Saviour, and there is no difference. Here also you learn, that if you sin presumptuously, after you have received the knowledge of the truth; if you do despite to the Spirit of grace, and trample on the blood of the Redeemer, there remains no more sacrifice for sin.

Go now, fall down before God in the exercise of humble faith and deep repentance; renounce every sin, and yield yourselves to him, to serve him in newness of life. Cultivate in your hearts the temper which the gospel requires. Repel with indignation every attack on your faith and virtue. Indulge no sentiments which tend to corrupt the manners.—Make improvements in knowledge, and abound in every good work.

The zealous practice of religion, is the best guard against errour in doctrine, and defection from the truth. Maintain a good conscience, and you will not make shipwreck of the faith. Shun the way of the wicked; for this is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble. Walk in the path of the just; for this is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

SERMON XI.

A Paralytic healed on the Faith of Others.

MARK, ii. 5.

When Jesus saw their faith; he said unto the sick of the Palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

BY the preaching and miracles of Jesus Christ in Capernaum, his fame was much celebrated in that city and in the country around; so that wherever he went, as soon as the people knew where he was, they crowded around him; some to hear his doctrines, and some to receive cures for themselves or their friends.

At the time of the transaction referred to in the text, he was in a private house in this city, whither, it seems, he had retired for refreshment and rest. The people hearing that he was there, gathered together in such multitudes, that there was no room to receive them, not even about the door. And while he was preaching the word to them, probably from an upper chamber in the house, there came four men, bringing on a bed, a poor helpless patient, with a design to lay him before Jesus; hoping, that, moved at the sight of such a miserable object, he

would exert for his relief that healing power, with which he was endued. When they drew near the house, they found such a throng within and around it, that they could not come to him through the door: They therefore ascended to the roof of the house, (for the Jewish houses, being flat roofed, had stairs without) and there opened a passage so wide, as to let down the paralytic, with his bed, into the chamber, where Jesus was. "And he, seeing their faith, said to the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee."

The great pains, which they took in this case, discovered their full belief of Christ's power and mercy to heal this unhappy man. Jesus could as easily have healed him at a distance; but that the miracle might be as publick as possible, he suspended the exercise of his healing power, till they had let the man down before him through the roof. For his miracles were designed, not merely for the benefit of the particular persons, who were the immediate subjects of them; but rather for the general benefit of mankind in establishing the truth of his gospel.

The phrase used to express the sick man's release from his infirmity is, *Thy sins be forgiven thee.* That it is not a remission of the moral guilt of sin, which is here intended, is evident, because it was granted upon the faith of others. Whether the paralytic himself believed, or not, it is not said—be this as it may; yet *his* faith was not the special reason of his being healed, but the faith of those who brought him. As the design of the miracle was to make a publick display of Christ's divine power, so *their* faith, and not the faith of the patient himself, gave occasion for the exercise of this power in healing him; for it was *their* faith which brought the patient before him in this conspicuous manner. The remission of moral guilt is granted only on personal faith and penitence. In the following

words our Saviour sufficiently explains what he here intends by this phrase. When some reasoned within themselves, "Why doth this man speak blasphemy? Who can forgive sin but God alone?" Jesus said, "Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, take up thy bed and walk? But that ye may know, that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, he saith to the sick of the palsy, Arise, take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up his bed, and went forth before them all. And they were all amazed, and glorified God."

The Jews considered temporal calamities, and especially diseases of body, as the punishment of some particular sins, of which the sufferers had been guilty. Hence this enquiry of the disciples concerning the man born blind; "Who sinned, this man, or his parents?" For this reason, the removal of sickness was expressed by the forgiveness of sin; for it was considered as a release from the temporal punishment of it. This language is used in the Old Testament. The prophet says, "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick, for the people shall be forgiven their iniquities." The Psalmist says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases." This observation shews the perverseness of the Pharisees, in charging Christ with blasphemy, for saying, Thy sins are forgiven thee, when they knew it to be a common expression for release from bodily afflictions. They called that blasphemy in him, which in others would have passed as innocent.

What I would especially remark in these words, is the benefit, which this sick man received, from the faith of others. He was healed upon the faith of the men who brought him to Jesus. Several in-

stances of the same kind occur in the history of Christ's miracles.

The faith of the centurion obtained a cure for his servant. The devil was cast out of a man deaf and dumb, through the faith of those who attended him, when he himself had no tongue to ask the favour. The daughter of one is raised from the dead, and the son of another is delivered from an unclean spirit by the faith of the father. The earnest prayer and strong faith of the woman of Canaan, obtained relief for her daughter, who was grievously vexed with a devil.

The conduct of the Saviour, in these instances, is agreeable to the general plan of God's moral government.

As he has placed mankind in a state of mutual dependence, so it is an essential part of the constitution of his government, that some shall be benefited by the faith and piety, or shall be liable to suffer by the vice and wickedness of others.

The bestowment indeed, of future and eternal blessings, must depend on personal qualifications. The happiness of the heavenly world can be enjoyed only by those, whose hearts are prepared for it, and whose tempers are assimilated to it. "Without holiness no man can see the Lord." "Except a man be born of the spirit, and made partaker of a divine nature, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." But then God is often pleased to grant temporal blessings, and spiritual privileges and advantages to some, in consequence of the faith, piety and prayers of others.

Observation shews us, that this is no uncommon case. The virtue and happiness of communities greatly depend on the wisdom and integrity of rulers. Publick manners are formed by the example of men in power and influence, and the national prosperity is connected with national virtue. So it

is also in families. Not only the health and comfort, but the virtue and reputation of children, are owing in a great measure to the wise care, good example, and faithful instructions of those by whom they are educated. It is the parent who usually gives the first virtuous or vicious turn to the manners of the young. And this early bias often determines the character for life. The child, trained up in the way in which he should go, pursues it still when he is old. The youth, neglected and left to his own perverse inclinations, brings shame on his family, and ruin on himself.

The case is the same with neighbourhoods and christian societies. A few vicious persons in a vicinity, will sometimes corrupt a number more, and by degrees spread the infection of their baleful example far around. On the other hand, men of strict virtue and exemplary piety, are, by their example and conversation, a great restraint on the wicked, and a mighty encouragement to those who are virtuously disposed.

The advantages which one enjoys by his connexion with the virtuous, and the dangers to which another is exposed by his connexion with the vicious, are not always owing merely to himself, but often to the immediate providence of God, who allots to each one, such trials, and such assistances, as his wisdom sees fit. That one is born of virtuous parents, and receives the first rudiments of his education in a pious family, that another has his lot assigned him in an irreligious and prayerless house, is not the result of their own previous choice, but of the sovereign disposal of providence. And every one, as soon as he arrives at the age of discretion and consideration, is bound so to improve the advantages which he enjoys as to guard against the influence of the temptations which surround him.

From this part of the divine constitution, we may derive some useful instructions.

1. We see the reasonableness of *intercession.*

If God is pleased to employ some men as *visible* instruments of general good, we may rationally suppose, that he often, in a more *secret* and *invisible* manner, connects the happiness of many with the fervent prayers of a few, or even one godly soul. Of the Jews, in a corrupt period, the apostle says, "They were beloved for their fathers' sake: For the christian churches which he had planted, he prays, that God would grant them his spirit and grace: And their prayers he solicits for himself, that God would assist and succeed him in his work, and support and comfort him in his trials. And he professes a full expectation of great and extensive good, from the united efficacy of *his* and *their* supplications and intercessions.

His prayers for them, and his request of their prayers for him, and his advice to Christians in general to pray for one another and for all men, are grounded on this principle, that God is pleased to grant favors to some, in consideration of the faith, piety and intercession of others.

If this were not agreeable to the plan of God's government, there would be no foundation for intercession in any case whatever.

Though we are assured that God will never save an impenitent sinner, on account of another's repentance or intercession, yet we may suppose, that, in answer to the prayers of godly friends, he often grants to sinners the *means* of repentance, and his *blessing* to accompany these means, and to render them effectual.

God has seen fit to place men in a connexion with each other. He has put into them affections and feelings, which lead them to associate together, and which interest them in each other's happiness.

He requires benevolence as a main principle of all virtue. For the encouragement of this benevolence, he is pleased to smile upon the regular operations of it, and to render them subservient to our mutual happiness. One exercise of benevolence is intercession; and it is as reasonable to suppose that he should make our mutual intercession beneficial to each other, as that he should bless and succeed our instructions to children, our counsels to friends, our alms to the poor, or any other exercise of charity; for it is his influence that gives them efficacy.

Some will ask perhaps, How is it reasonable, that our future happiness should be made to depend on another's prayers? We have not the command of their hearts, we cannot oblige them to pray for us; Why should we be exposed to suffer for their neglect?

You will not suffer for their neglect; you will suffer only for your own. Ask humbly and you will receive; seek diligently and you will find. Comply with the terms of the gospel, and the blessings promised are yours. Do your own duty well and you are safe. God will not withhold from you any good thing, which you can claim on the foot of his justice, or his promise, whether others pray for you or not. But what if he vouchsafes to you some favours, which you have not asked, or which you have forfeited by neglect? What if, in his good providence, he brings you in the way of some useful warnings and instructions, and grants you some awakened and convincing influences of his kind spirit, when you have not sought them? And, what if he does this in answer to the fervent prayers of others? Will you say that all this is wrong? Will you consider it as a matter of complaint? Will you think it unreasonable that christian friends should implore for you that mercy which you have despised, and that God should regard their prayers for you, when you make

none for yourselves?—God will injure no man—he will break his promise with no man: But he often bestows undeserved and uncovenanted mercies—he often continues, or renews abused and forfeited favours. And these are not the less to be esteemed, because they are granted in consequence of the faith and prayers of others; but rather to be received with more admiring gratitude.

2. We see from this subject, that the doctrine of scripture concerning our being involved in the consequences of the primitive apostasy, is agreeable to the analogy of providence.

The scripture plainly teaches us, that the first man stood in a publick capacity, and acted for his posterity; and that, in consequence of his transgression, they not only are exposed to death, but inherit a disordered constitution, a depraved nature, which, as soon as they begin their moral life, leads them astray. The Apostle says, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin. By one man's offence death reigned. By one man's disobedience many were made sinners."

Does this look hard and unjust? It is nothing singular or uncommon.

If an offender against the state is punished with death or confiscation, his children suffer loss. The man who spends his substance in riot and debauchery, beggars his family as well as himself. The parent who, by intemperance, destroys his constitution, often transmits diseases to his children, which render their life unhappy, and issue in early death. Bodily disorders distemper the mind, disturb the passions, becloud the intellect, and introduce irregular inclinations. Not only bodily diseases, but mental dispositions, are often hereditary and transmitted from father to son. The vicious examples and corrupt principles of some parents, early deprave the minds and vitiate the manners of their

children, and it is no easy matter to recover them to right sentiments and a virtuous life. And why is it thought unjust, that we should partake of some unhappy consequences from the first transgression, rather than that we should be liable to suffer for the misconduct of our immediate parents? The latter we see to be fact; and it were absurd to deny the former. But whether we believe the doctrine in question or not, still mankind are mortal in body, and depraved in mind. They are liable to death, and inclined to sin. Either they were made so in their original state, or by some subsequent means they are fallen into this state. And which appears most reasonable—That they should come out of the Creator's hands such as we now see them; or, that they should be suffered to fall into such a state in consequence of the perverseness and disobedience of their first progenitors?—Should you see a nation in a state of distraction and riot, violence and confusion, Which would appear most credible—That this was the original constitution of their government; or, that it was an unhappy state, introduced by the folly and injustice of some, who, being appointed to act for them, had abused and perverted their constitution? If we deny the transmission of sin and death from the first offender, still we cannot thus get rid of sin nor of death. They are both in the world, and they both seem likely to continue: And our deliverance from them comes not by a denial of the cause which the scripture assigns, but by an application of the remedy which God has provided.—This brings me to remark,

3. That our salvation through the atonement and righteousness of a redeemer, appears to correspond with the general constitution of God's moral government.

It is an essential part of the divine plan, that the virtue of some should not only benefit themselves,

but extend its kind and salutary influence to others. We see this to be the case among men; and probably it is the case among all moral beings except those who are in a state of punishment. The angels, we are told, are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. On the other hand, the preaching of the gospel, by the apostles, was intended, not only to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which had been hidden from former ages, but also to display unto principalities and powers, in heavenly places, the manifold wisdom of God. And we are taught in the book of Daniel, that the angels strengthen and help one another in the services respectively assigned them. The glory of God's moral kingdom greatly consists in the benevolence of his subjects toward one another, and in the disposition of all to promote the general happiness. Were it not agreeable to the divine constitution, that the virtuous actions of one should, in some way or other, redound to the benefit of many, there would be no room for benevolence: It would cease to be a virtue.

It appears then to be a credible thing, that when the human race had fallen into guilt and ruin, a Saviour should be sent from heaven, to instruct them by his doctrines, to exemplify their duty in his life, and also to redeem them from punishment by his death; and that the benefits of his righteousness and death should be made over to them, on their humble faith and sincere repentance. Though this dispensation of grace surpasses all human discovery, yet there is nothing in it contrary to reason, or to the analogy of providence; but, in many respects, it corresponds with both. The gospel teaches us, that we are justified by God's grace, through the redemption that is in Christ; that we have redemption through his blood; that we are made the righteousness of God in him; and that

to as many as believe, God imputeth righteousness without works. It is not the intention of Christ's death to save us from punishment in a way of sin; but to procure for us pardon in the way of repentance. "He bore our sins, that we, being dead to sin, should live to righteousness." The mercy of God is inclined to pardon and save sinners; but his wisdom saw fit to dispense pardon and salvation only through the blood of a Redeemer, that thus sin might be condemned, God's justice displayed, and his law magnified. God sent his son in the likeness of sinful flesh, that he, by a sacrifice for sin, might condemn sin in the flesh. He set him forth a propitiation, that he might be just and the justifier of them who believe. The law therefore is not made void, but established through faith. I would observe,

4. Our subject removes the principal objection urged against the dedication of infants to God in the ordinance of baptism. For it shews, that some may be benefited by the faith of others.

It is often asked "What advantage is baptism to infants? They have no knowledge of the use and design of it. They have not that faith, which is required to baptism. If they are baptised, it cannot be on their own faith; it must be on the faith of their parents: And what benefit can they derive from the faith of another?"

But this is no more an objection against the baptism of infants, than against intercession for infants. If your children are sick, you pray for the preservation of their lives. If they appear to be in danger of death, you pray for their reception into the world of glory. If when they come forward in life, you see them wickedly inclined, you pray for divine restraints. Yea, whatever be their case, you commend them to God's care and protection, and pray that he would impart to them his sanctifying

and saving grace. And do you not pray in faith; with a belief that God is merciful and gracious, and that your prayers may avail to obtain for them some real benefits? But if the faith of the parent can be no advantage to his children, Why should you pray for them? If it can be an advantage, Why may you not dedicate them to God in baptism? The objection certainly is no stronger in the latter case, than in the former. They are as ignorant of what you do in one case, as in the other. Christ often bestowed healing mercy on children, when he was applied to in their behalf. And when some brought little children to him, that he should pray for them, he complied with their request. He took them into his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them, and said, Suffer the little children to come to me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

We see that the faith and prayers of parents may procure some advantages for children: Why should the doubt arise in the case of baptism only? There seems to be no doubt in any other case.

It is not the faith of the parent, which saves his children. If they are saved, it is by the mercy of God through the redemption that is in Christ.

But then God has instituted a gracious covenant, in which he promises, that he will be a God to believers and to their children. In token of his faithfulness, he has appointed baptism as a seal of this covenant. The believing parent dedicates his children to God, trusting that he will be a God to them; that if they are removed in infancy, he will receive them to his kingdom; if they are continued in life, he will grant them the means of salvation, and will pour on them his spirit and blessing. At the same time, he resolves, that he will bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Now does it seem unreasonable that God should exercise mercy towards children? That he should express his

designs of mercy, by comprehending them within his covenant, and by making promises in their favour? That he should require parents to give them up to him, and should institute a particular form and ceremony to be used on the occasion? Is it no advantage to children to have the prayers of parents, and the prayers of the church of God in their behalf? Is it no advantage that they should be brought up under the care of those, who have actually given them to God, and solemnly engaged to train them up for him? If there is any advantage in these things, then their baptism is a reasonable service.

But shall we imagine, that no children are saved but the baptised offspring of christians? I answer, God's tender mercies are over all his works; but the promises of the covenant are to believers and their children; not to unbelievers or heathens, as such, and their children. These we are to leave, where the scripture leaves them, in the hands of a righteous and merciful God. But, Is it no comfort to reflect, that there are given to us exceeding great and precious promises? Admitting that all who die in infancy will be saved, yet, Can it be thought unreasonable, that the baptised offspring of pious Christians should have some advantages, in the kingdom of heaven, above those who are not with the covenant of promise? The mercies of God are free, and he distributes them with a sovereign hand, as his wisdom directs. Our business is to attend to God's institutions and commands, and in the way of duty to trust his promises.

5. Our subject teaches us the importance of the station in which we are placed. We are acting not merely for ourselves, but for others—for many others—how many we cannot tell; for we know not how many are connected with us; nor how extensive may be the influence of our good or bad conduct.

A holy and religious life is certainly of vast importance to ourselves; for on this depends the happiness of our existence through all the succeeding ages of eternal duration. But when we consider ourselves as standing in a near connexion with our fellow probationers; when we realize, how much good a sinner may destroy, or a saint promote; how many souls may be corrupted by the example of the one, and how many may be converted by the influence of the other; the importance of our personal religion rises beyond all conception.

You view the minister, the ruler, and the parent, as having a station assigned them, in which others are deeply interested. You think, that they ought to act in their places with anxious fidelity, because on this may depend the happiness of multitudes. But remember, no man lives to himself alone. You are in a capacity to do much good; and your abuse of this capacity may in its consequences, prove the ruin of thousands.

Viewing yourselves in this light, you will, in regard to the happiness of others, as well as your own, be careful what manner of persons you are.

6. We see that benevolence must be an essential part of true religion.

If God has placed us in such a connexion with those around us, that their virtue and happiness will be affected by our conduct, we are evidently bound to act with a regard to their interest.

We are, indeed, more capable of serving our own interest, than that of others; and the interest, of our friends, than that of strangers. We are, therefore, first charged with the care of ourselves, and next with the care of our families and dependents. We know our own and their wants more perfectly, and feel them more sensibly, than we can the wants of those at a distance. But we are to wish well to all; to do good, as we have opportunity; and to

pray for those, to whom our actual beneficence cannot extend.

Benevolence is a principle which ought uniformly to govern us, in the common duties of life and religion. We are to work with our hands the thing which is good, that we may not only supply our own wants, but give to them who need. And we are to maintain the practice of piety and virtue, that we may not only secure our own reward, but assist others in securing theirs.

On this principle also, we are to exercise forbearance and condescension to one another, and to seek, not merely our own profit, but the profit of many. The Christian, who, under pretence of promoting piety in his own heart, acts, in doubtful matters, with a haughty indifference to the peace and edification of his brethren, plainly shows that he is void of that charity, which is the glory of religion, and without which all his zeal will profit him nothing.

Let us therefore, as becomes Christians, exhort and comfort, strengthen and encourage one another in every good work, and thus be fellow helpers to the kingdom of God.

SERMON XII.

The Vial poured into the Sun; considered in accommodation to the present Times.

A FAST SERMON, APRIL, 1794.

REVELATION, xvi. 8, 9.

And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues; and they repented not to give him glory.

WHATEVER may be the great events, or the precise period, primarily intended in this figurative description; it may justly be accommodated to any time, when the vials of God's anger are poured on a guilty world, and the effects produced by them, are increasing infidelity and impiety, instead of general repentance and amendment.

This book of the Revelation is a prophetick description of the most interesting occurrences, relat-

ing to the church, which were to take place in the world, from the time of saint John's vision, down to the final judgment.

Whoever believes, that this book was written seventeen hundred years ago, as we have indubitable evidence that it was, must believe, that it was dictated by divine inspiration; because we see, in fact, that many of the events so long since foretold, have been exactly accomplished. To mention but one instance, and that a marvellous one; it foretels, That there would arise, in the Christian church, an idolatrous power, which should continue twelve hundred and sixty years—that this power would gradually gain strength, and widely extend its influence—that it would introduce and establish the superstitions of paganism, and cruelly persecute and destroy those who adhered to the purity of the gospel—that, in this long period, true religion would often be reduced to a low, and almost desperate condition; but that, all along, there would be some to stand forth as witnesses to its truth, and supporters of its interest, even at the peril of their lives—that toward the close of this period, the idolatrous and persecuting power would gradually decline, until it should be utterly extinguished, and the pure gospel universally prevail.

And, Who does not know, that, within a few centuries after John's time, there actually arose such a power, which has now continued in the Christian world, for more than a thousand years, exercising all that superstition, oppression and tyranny, which are here described?—And, Who does not see, that this power has for some years, been on the decline, and is now tending to its exit?

As it is difficult to ascertain, with precision, the time when it arose; so it is difficult to determine, with exactness, the time when it will fall. But that

it is now drawing towards its dissolution, there can be no reasonable doubt. All appearances justify this expectation.

Its destruction, however, will be attended with violent struggles, and terrible convulsions, the effects of which will be extensively felt. This we may justly apprehend from its national influence and connexions; and this seems agreeable to prophecy.

We are then to look for great events and important changes in the world, before the extinction of this oppressive power.

Some of the changes leading to its dissolution are probably intended in our text. But whether they are already past, or still future, or even now in operation, may perhaps be doubtful. Mr. Lowman thinks, that the words are a description of the divisions and convulsions, which rent the papal dominions in the fifteenth century, just before the reformation: And that the next vial, which was poured into the seat of the beast, is a prediction of the reformation itself. Bishop Newton supposes, that none of the seven vials have yet been poured out, but that they all respect times which are still future.

Mr. Fleming, who published his sentiments more than ninety years ago, has applied this prophecy, in part, to the time now present. And he has, with remarkable exactness of time and circumstances, described some of the events of the day; such as the violent contest between *France* and *Austria*, which are the principal parties in the present war; the depressed condition of France, and especially of the royal family; and the superiority, which France, in her turn, should gain over her enemies.

Whether the principles, on which he grounds his calculations, are just, I shall not take upon me to

determine. However this may be, there are several circumstances in the present time, to which the prediction may be accommodated, and which point it out to us as a subject of our attention and improvement.

This correspondence I shall first illustrate; and then shall lead your thoughts to a practical use of the passage.

The correspondence of this prediction with the present time, I shall illustrate in several circumstances.

The three preceding vials were poured out upon the earth, upon the sea, and upon the rivers and fountains of water. This fourth is poured out upon the SUN. It must therefore portend some events more important and interesting than the former.

The luminaries of heaven, in prophetick stile, denote kingdoms and empires. In the prophecy of Balaam, it is said, "There shall come a *star* out of Jacob, and a *sceptre* shall rise out of Israel." In Daniel's vision of the he goat, it is said, "His horn waxed great, even to the *host of heaven*, and did cast down some of the *stars* to the ground." The downfall of Babylon is expressed by "the falling of the *morning star*." The *sun* then, being the greatest and most illustrious of the heavenly luminaries, [illegible], in this prophecy, intend some of the *principal* kingdoms and powers of the world.

Farther: As the sun is a body of the most extensive influence in the system, and that which gives light to other bodies, so the vial poured on the sun naturally denotes a *general* war among the most respectable nations; a war so vehement and extensive, that its malignant fury is felt in all the enlightened parts of the world.

It is said, "Men were scorched with great heat." This probably intends some distinguishing circum-

stances of cruelty and zeal in the manner of prosecuting the war.

The moral effect of it is a visible increase of impiety and irreligion. "Men blasphemed the name of God, who had power over these plagues, and repented not to give him glory."

Keeping these circumstances of the prophecy in view, let us inquire, whether we cannot see them, at this period, remarkably verified.

The present *European* war is, with little intermission, a continuation of the late *American* war. It evidently originated from our long and bloody contest with Britain for the rights of independence. The principles of republicanism, here asserted and defended both by the pen of the politician, and the sword of the soldier, were, with a kind of electrical stroke, transfused through the army and navy of France, which had been sent to our assistance. By them these principles were disseminated through that mighty kingdom. There they immediately began to operate with vigour, and soon they effected a complete revolution. Alarmed at this great event, the ruling powers of neighboring nations combined to restore and support the exploded system of monarchy. The house of Austria, from its near connexion with the royal family of France, took the lead, and other nations followed the example. The war is become general. The powers which remain neutral, may perhaps find themselves under a necessity of taking part in the war, or of combining in force to preserve their neutrality. If any particular nations are designated, in the prophecy, by the SUN, on account of their *power*, *influence*, or *enlightened* state, these are certainly engaged in the controversy.

And *they are scorched with great heat.* Never has a war been conducted with fiercer zeal and keener animosity. In ordinary wars, the object is some

point of honour, tract of territory, or privilege of trade. And after a few millions of treasure, and a few hundred thousands of lives have been sacrificed, the contending parties, wearied out and exhausted, open a treaty of peace, make mutual concessions, and sit down nearly in the same place, from whence they arose. But in this war the object is different. France is contending for her republican government: Kings are contending for their crowns. France expects, that, if she is overpowered, she must see her territory dismembered, her exploded monarchy restored, her citizens enslaved, and her liberties trampled in the dirt. The confederated kings expect, that if France supports her revolution, they shall feel convulsions in their own dominions, and see one revolution following another, till the crowns of monarchs are tossed from their heads, and the sceptres wrested from their hands.

These apprehensions fire the zeal, and urge the exertions of the parties in support of their respective objects. They view the controversy, as embracing every thing great and important; and as not to end, like former wars, in mutual restitution, and a friendly accommodation; but either in the total subversion, or in the general establishment of absolute monarchy.

The war is prosecuted with uncommon severity. For many years past the manners of mankind have, by the increase of knowledge, been gradually softening. Even war had begun to divest itself of its horrors, and to assume a milder form. But now we see the barbarity of uncivilized ages, which had been retiring, called back again on the stage.

But what most signally marks the coincidence of the prophecy with the aspects of the times, is the prevailing impiety.

Look through Europe; What symptoms of a reformation can you see? Is there any increase of piety?—Any amendment of morals—any special attention to the interests of religion? Even in France, which has experienced a variety of interesting events, Have there been any national acknowledgments of a governing Providence? On the contrary, Are not the forms of religion derided, the principles of piety exploded, atheism avowed, and the entrance of their churchyards marked with this awful sentiment, that "Death is an eternal sleep?"

It may be useful to inquire, What can be the cause of this *apparent* growth of irreligion among a people, who have long enjoyed the gospel, and are now under such severe calamities?

This is, in some degree, the usual effect of war; especially of intestine and civil convulsions. These, when they rise high, and operate with violence, engross the thoughts and conversation, awaken malignant passions and bitter criminations, dissipate serious sentiments, and vitiate the manners.

In France, the established religion, for ages, has been popery, with its grossest absurdities. The revolution has suddenly torn off the mask of ignorance, and broken the fetters of bigotry. People are now at liberty to see with their own eyes, to speak what they think, and act what they please. In a zeal against the newly discovered absurdities of ancient superstitions, many have rushed to the opposite extreme, and discarded even rational christianity.

Infidels, of whom there have long been numbers among the men of learning and influence, taking advantage of the times, have industriously, and too successfully, disseminated their licentious opinions.

It may farther be observed, that the civil and ecclesiastical establishments were intimately incorporated; and the forms of religion made the tools of state policy. The church and the nobility possessed a great part of the most valuable lands, and engrossed a large share of the publick revenues. As religion, in the hands of tyrants, has been made an instrument of oppression, the people, on a sudden discovery of the sacrilegious fraud, have, in their surprise, conceived an indiscriminate prejudice against the very name of religion; and, without waiting to distinguish the precious from the vile, and to separate the rational from the absurd, they have almost exploded the substance of Christianity. We must believe, however, that the seeds of truth are latent in the soil, and when this inclement season is past, they will be cultivated with wiser attention, and spring up under a more smiling sky.

From what has taken place in France, we have cause to fear, what may be the general state of religion, for a time, before the introduction of the happy period which the scriptures foretel.

In most of the nations of Europe the government is similar to the late government of France; especially in respect of the union of the civil and religious establishments; and in respect of the despotism exercised over the body of the people. Before that happy period commences, there will be revolutions in favour of liberty. For civil liberty is a necessary preparative to the progress of truth, and a discriminating circumstance of that time. Human nature is the same in other nations, as in France; and we may expect, that political revolutions will have the same effect on the state of religion elsewhere, as they have had there.

The reasons why the American revolution did not, with the ancient forms of government, subvert the forms of religion, were, because religion

and police were not in the same manner blended, and the people were more enlightened, and less oppressed.

Religion, in its natural tendency, is subservient to the peace and happiness of society, and therefore ought to be protected and supported by the civil government; but it ought never to be so incorporated with it, as to become a tool of temporal domination.

From a view of the state of Europe, from a recollection of what has taken place in France, and from the prophetic intimations of scripture, there is much cause to fear, that deism and atheism, and, with them, every species of immorality, will, for a time, increase in the world, and religion sink into obscurity, or be confined to a narrow circle.

Persecution probably will no more kindle her faggots, or draw her sword. But a general indifference to, and contempt of the gospel, may as sadly depress the interest and glory of the church, as ever persecution has done.

Infidelity is the last expedient, which the grand adversary will employ, to banish truth from the earth. In this he may probably succeed for a while; but he will finally be defeated. When the rage of contention shall subside, and Liberty shall extend her benign influence among the nations, their passions will settle into a calm; free enquiry will take place; the evidences of truth will rise to view and come home, with force, to the mind; a more plentiful effusion of the divine spirit will be granted than men's minds, amidst the rage of war, and the tumult of revolutions, are capable of receiving; the gospel will be preached with purity and zeal and heard with candour and attention; its happy influence will be felt in society and its divine power experienced in the heart; and the church will grow

under the patronage of government, when pious rulers shall be its nursing fathers.

While we lament the declining state of religion in Europe, we may, with just concern, bring our reflections nearer home.

Since our late war with Britain, literature and arts have been improving in the country; but our moral state appears not to be mended. To ourselves we may apply God's reproof of Israel, "As they increased, so they sinned." And we may fear the threatening which follows—"Therefore will I turn their glory into shame."

We have, too fondly for an infant people, imitated the luxuries of European nations. The pomp and show of foreign courts seem to have charms too captivating to be resisted. Many of our private citizens affect a style of living, which their means will not fully justify. Infidelity, in the several forms of deism, universalism, and fatalism, has made threatening progress. Many are industriously labouring to throw off the salutary restraints, which the gospel lays on men's passions and lusts. The publick worship of God, that kind and friendly institution, is growing into awful neglect, not merely among the higher ranks, but among people of every class. The Sabbath, which was revered by our fathers, and observed with a conscientious exactness, is treated with indifference. A religious profession, and an attendance on the special ordinances of Christ, are, by many, utterly disregarded. Family devotion seems to be growing into disuse, and family government is declining with it.

Though we have lately experienced an important revolution, yet the day of danger may not be past. Besure our moral state does not promise us security. Our connexions with the nations of Europe are so strong, and our resemblance of them in im-

piety and wickedness is so great, that we may justly apprehend a share in their calamities. When the vial is poured out upon the sun, the burning beams will be darted far around, and the remote inhabitants of the earth, will be scorched with the malignant heat. Revolutions in Europe will probably shake our ground, and perhaps produce some new and unexpected changes. Let us not, in our prosperity, imagine that our mountain stands strong, nor flatter ourselves, that its foundation can never be moved.

Is it not apparent, that the words of our text, whatever period they primarily intend, may justly be accommodated to our own times?—Let us then seriously regard the practical instructions which they afford us.

1. We are here taught, that it deeply concerns us to give glory to God by repentance of sin, and amendment of life.

It is the complaint in the text, that, under God's judgments, men repented not to give him glory. Let us beware, lest this complaint be verified in us.

The eternal, independent God, manifests himself before our eyes in the grandeur and variety of the works which he has made, in the regular course of his providence, and in the judgments which he executes on the earth.

When we contemplate events in the natural, or political world, we are fully convinced, that there sits, at the head of the universe, a Being of infinite power, unsearchable wisdom, unwearied goodness, and perfect righteousness. The Lord reigns; let the saints rejoice; but let the guilty tremble. Injustice and oppression are often seen in the governments administered by men. "But marvel not at the matter. Doth not he who is higher than the highest regard it? And there be higher than they."

If we believe there is such a Being, we must feel

our obligation to glorify him. The man, who acknowledging the existence and government of this all perfect Being, can banish him from his thoughts, live without a sense of his goodness, or a fear of his displeasure; without prayer in the day of distress, or praise in the time of prosperity, can confine his cares to the present short term of existence, and neglect all preparation for futurity; this man discovers a stupidity no less criminal than atheism itself.

By breaking the commandment, we dishonour God: By returning to our duty, we give him glory.

Repentance is an acknowledgment of God, as a Being glorious in holiness; a Being who cannot look on iniquity, and who will by no means clear the guilty. It is a reliance on his great name, "The Lord God merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquities, transgressions and sins." It is a submission to his supreme authority, who has commanded all men, every where, to repent. It is a compliance with the benevolent purpose of his moral government toward our apostate race, which is to recover them from guilt and ruin, and bring them to glory and virtue. It is obeying the Son of God, who came to redeem us from iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. It is embracing the kind motions of the divine spirit, who strives with perverse transgressors, to turn them from sin to righteousness, and from disobedience to the wisdom of the just.

2. The complaint in the text, "that under God's judgments, men repented not to give him glory," supposes and implies, that judgments are designed and adapted to awaken sinners and bring them to repentance.

They display the majesty and supremacy of God, who has power over all plagues.

They shew us human weakness and dependence, and the precarious continuance of all earthly riches and glories.

They make it manifest to every eye, that he who rules in the heavens, can bring princes to nothing, and make the judges of the earth as vanity.

They demonstrate the awful justice of God, who comes forth out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity; and they solemnly warn us of that dreadful day, when he will descend with fire, and ride forth in his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebukes with flames of fire.

They teach us the horrible nature and fatal tendency of vice; for from hence come wars and fightings. It is ambition, avarice and revenge, which have so often thrown the nations into confusion, and poured destruction over half the globe.

Wasting calamities are suited to make men thoughtful and serious, to remind them of a future world, and to impress on their hearts a sense of the vanity of this.

Wars, the most common scourges of guilty nations, multiply deaths, especially among the youthful and active part of our species; increase the number of distressed widows, helpless orphans, and mourning parents; render life and its enjoyments precarious; change the course of business; transfer property from man to man; dissipate wealth in the hands of one, and accumulate it in the hands of another, to be again scattered and driven away by the next rude blast, or the next sweeping surge.

In such an uncertain and gloomy state of things, when death, captivity and sorrow, stalk around—when worldly interests are all afloat, and the very ground on which we stand, is convulsed, one would think, mankind must become more serious and pray-

erful, more indifferent to this world, and more attentive to the vast concerns of futurity.

These happy effects divine judgments doubtless produce on many; but the effects are far more partial than we should have imagined.

Yea; Our text teaches us,

3. That men, under judgments sent for their reformation, sometimes grow more impious and incorrigible.

When the vial was poured out upon the sun, and men were scorched with fire, "they repented not, but blasphemed the name of God." The same was the effect of the next vial. When this was poured on the seat of the beast, "his kingdom was full of darkness, and men gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains, and repented not of their deeds." So, when the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air, there fell upon men a great hail, and they blasphemed the name of God, because of the plague."

These expressions, doubtless, denote a great prevalence of impiety, profaneness and infidelity.

The wickedness which abounds under these vials, is of a very different kind from that which appeared under the former judgments, designated by the trumpets.

When the sixth angel sounded his trumpet, as related in the ninth chapter, the four angels bound at the river Euphrates, were let loose to slay the third part of men.

This is, by Mr. Lowman, referred to the conquests of the Saracens in Spain and other parts of Europe, in the eighth century. But Dr. Newton and others apply it to the destructive wars of the Turks, or Othmans, in the eastern part of the Roman empire, which began in the thirteenth century, and continued, with some intermissions, until all

the eastern empire was reduced under the Othman dominion.

Now it is remarked, that, "The rest of the men, who were not killed by these plagues, yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, silver, brass, wood and stone; neither repented they of their murders, sorceries, fornications and thefts."

It is observable, that, under the plagues of the vials, nothing is said about the worship of idols and demons, and the practice of sorcery and divination, and pretensions to miracles and revelations. But it is said, once and again, "Men *blasphemed* the name of God." They discarded all revelation, and threw off all regard to God and his providence.

The difference is, in my mind, remarkable. Have not facts verified the predictions?

In preceding ages, whenever any great calamities fell on the papal dominions, every species of superstition was increased; such as the worship of images, prayers for the dead, the adoration of saints, donations to the church, mortifications of the body, and the observance of festivals and holydays; for these were considered as the only means of removing divine judgments, and propitiating an angry Deity.

These forms of superstition have, for some time, been sinking into discredit. But do we find, that, as they have declined, rational religion has increased? Has not infidelity rather come forward to take their place?

Superstition is not the prevailing characteristic of the day. But if impiety, infidelity and irreligion abound in the christian world, and increase among us; we may conclude, that we have fallen into the times

described in our text, or into times which much resemble them.

4. There is one observation more, which naturally arises from our text; namely, that the vials of God's wrath will continue to be poured on the christian world, 'till it is reformed.

Under the fourth vial, men repented not of their deeds; and therefore another immediately follows. Under *this* the same spirit of impiety remains; and a sixth vial succeeds. Still men blaspheme God's name, because of their plagues; and plagues more dreadful, and more extensive soon ensue.

If men's wickedness is a cause of divine judgments, incorrigibleness is a reason of their continuance. If by preceding plagues they will not be reformed, God threatens that he will punish them seven times more, and still seven times more, for their sins. Such was the rule of God's government over the Jews: And such is the method of his proceeding toward the christian world.

Trumpet sounds after trumpet, to alarm the slumbering church: Vial after vial is poured forth to awaken and reclaim the guilty nations.

It is evidently God's design to purge out of his kingdom all things that offend, and to establish in the earth a kingdom of truth and righteousness; and until this glorious change shall be effected, his judgments will be continued. He has taken in hand the solemn work of reforming a guilty world; and he will see it accomplished.

We flatter ourselves perhaps, that the awful judgments foretold, are to fall only on the papal nations; and that protestants will be employed as agents to punish the more guilty and corrupt. But we may apply to ourselves the words of the prophet to the people of Israel, when they cruelly made war on their brethren of Judah: "Are there not with

you, even with *you*, sins against the Lord your God ?"

There are sins among the protestant, as well as papal nations; in America as well as Europe. Wherever the plague may first fall, the effects of them will be extensively felt. The vials will be poured out, not only into the seat of the beast, but upon the earth, the rivers, the seas, the air, and even the sun itself.

From the present aspect of the times, the common analogy of providence, and the predictions and threatenings of scripture, we have reason to expect, that there will be great calamities among the nations of the earth; and that in these calamities we ourselves shall have a share. Our connexion and intercourse with Europe render this probable: And there are also with us, even with *us*, sins against the Lord.

God is undoubtedly working, in his providence, to bring forward a more happy state of the church and of the world. But there is still much to be done; and great calamities are yet to be expected.

This is the warning of scripture and providence; *Prepare to meet your God.*

Let us be well established in the great principles of religion; and take heed lest we be drawn away with the error of the wicked. When we see, or hear that licentious opinions abound, let us remember, that this is an event which the gospel has foretold, and by this circumstance let us be confirmed in our faith.

Perhaps the greatest danger will not be in our day, but in succeeding times. Let us therefore train up our children in the knowledge and belief of the gospel, and form their manners according to its doctrines and precepts.

They who poison the tender minds of the youth with licentious and deistical notions, or throw in their way books written with a design to ridicule and discredit the gospel, are acting a part most unfriendly to the interest of society, the church of God, and the souls of men.

Liberality of sentiment, in opposition to blind bigotry, is much to be commended. But let no man, under pretence of liberality in religion, prostrate religion itself. Openness of mind and candour of enquiry are amiable in christian professors; and amiable in the young. But to give their minds a bias in favour of infidelity, and in opposition to the gospel, before they have capacity and opportunity for extensive reading and critical researches, is not to promote, but prevent openness and candour. The gospel is certainly harmless. It has no tendency to make men worse. It will not debase their minds, corrupt their virtue, or render them unfriendly to one another. Its tendency is the reverse. If a man does not believe it to be divine, yet he must believe it to be good. It is impossible therefore that any man, in labouring to obstruct it, should be influenced by laudable motives. They who, by writing or conversation, by publishing or circulating licentious books, spread the principles of infidelity, must have some unworthy design.

It is pretended by some, that if we educate youth in the belief of the gospel, we prejudice their minds, prevent their freedom in enquiry, and make them only christians by tradition.—But if the gospel may be true, and is certainly good, a bias in its favour is, at least, safe; a bias against it may be fatal. It is unjust, however, to call a religious education by the name of prejudice. As well may you give this name to a secular, or civil education. As well may you say, that youthful idleness and

ignorance are fine preparations for future eminence in a secular calling, or a civil profession.

If there is no danger in teaching our children the arts of life, there can be none in teaching them the existence and providence of God, the immortality of the soul, the obligations of virtue, and the doctrine of salvation through a dying Saviour.

These sentiments are so agreeable to the dictates of reason, so adapted to the wants of nature, and so conducive to the peace of the mind, that the benevolent heart will wish their universal influence.

It becomes us also, to honour the institutions of God, to sanctify his day, attend on his worship and observe his ordinances; for these are the means of promoting knowledge, piety and virtue.

Let every one review his life, repent of his sins, and work out his salvation. Our present term of existence is short; there is a world before us; death is our passage to that world. Prepared for death, we are prepared for every change which precedes it: Secure of heaven we have nothing to fear from this changing world.

Let us by our example recommend religion, support its credit, and aid its influence; and to all our labours add our fervent prayers, that in the midst of the years, God would revive his work, and in wrath remember mercy.

SERMON XIII.

Religion essentially included in the Love of our Country.

LUKE 7. iv, v.

And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this, for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a Synagogue.

THE person of whom this high character is given, was a Roman Centurion, who commanded a company of soldiers stationed in Capernaum. By residing in Judea, he had acquired a knowledge of, and was become a proselyte to the Jewish religion; and by his justice and benevolence, he had greatly endeared himself to the people among whom he was conversant.

This officer had a servant who was taken dangerously sick. Having heard the fame of Jesus, he desired some of the elders of the Jews, to go and entreat his compassion for this unhappy young man. The elders went; and when they were come to Jesus, they besought him, with great importunity, to grant to the centurion the favour which he asked; alleging this argument, "He is

worthy for whom thou shouldst do this, for he loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue."

As he had, for some time, dwelt in Judea, had embraced the religion of the country, and probably intended here to spend the rest of his days, he might now consider this as *his own* country. His love to the nation, with which he was connected, the elders urged as an evidence of his personal worth, and as a reason why they hoped Jesus would grant the favour requested. Jesus accordingly went and healed the servant. And, not only on account of the centurion's love to the nation, but also in regard to that benevolence which he expressed for a servant, the humility with which he made his application, the strength of his faith, and the just reasoning by which he supported it, Jesus in the presence of the people, gave him this high commendation; "I have not found so great faith; no, not in Israel."

The encomiums bestowed on this centurion, may lead us to consider the nature, and fruits of love to our country.

This is the same thing as love to our neighbour, with only such circumstantial differences, as arise from the different relations of the object.

Love to our neighbour the apostle has explained, "Owe no man any thing," says he, "but to love one another; for he who loveth another, hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness; thou shalt not covet: And, if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

Love to our country is this love to our neighbour, extended on the national scale, and applied to the

national interest. It is a desire of the general happiness, and a disposition to promote it according to our rank and station in society.

This love, however, will not stop at the bounds of our country; it will pass over, and extend its good wishes to the whole human race. It would rejoice to see, not one country only, but the world of mankind, in a state of prosperity and happiness.

As every man is charged with the immediate care of himself and his family, so he naturally feels more sensibly for himself and them, than for mankind at large. But while selflove prompts him to seek his own interest, and natural affection excites him to consult the interest of his particular friends, benevolence, operating in a just degree, will restrain him from pursuing his own interest, or that of his friends, in ways injurious to the rights of others.

A regard to our country is strengthened by our connection with it. "For our brethren and companions' sake, we say, Peace be within her." Selflove and benevolence are here combined. They cooperate and assist each other. But if we regard our country *only* for our own sake, this is mere *selfishness*, a principle which will excite us to seek our country's good, or hurt, according as we imagine, the one, or the other will best promote our own separate and personal interest.

Though we are not required to love another more than ourselves; yet we are required so to love all men, as to *injure* none for the sake of ourselves; but even to sacrifice our particular interest for the greater good of a number; not seeking our own profit, but the profit of *many* that they may be *saved*.

He who loves another with a pure heart, wishes all men happy. As he will not seek his own interest at the expense of his neighbours; or the interest

of his friends at the expense of his country; so neither will he attempt or desire to raise the glory, or extend the bounds of his country by oppressing or exterminating other nations, who have the same right, with himself, to existence, liberty and happiness.

War is always unlawful except in cases of necessary selfdefence. Whenever its object is merely wealth, or glory, or the extension of territory, it is the most horrid of all crimes; for every crime is involved in it, and every calamity produced by it.

If a nation, already possessed of more territory than they can occupy, should wantonly attempt to dispossess other nations, by spreading among them promiscuous destruction, whatever pretensions they may make of love to their own country, they are but the robbers and murderers of their follow creatures; and humanity will weep at their success. The boasted patriotism of the ancient Romans was only pride, ambition and avarice; and their love to their country, was cruelty to the human race.

These remarks may be sufficient to illustrate the general principle. We will now attend to its operations.

1. If we love our country, we shall be affected with her dangers and calamities.

"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem," says the Psalmist; "let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth." As all publick calamities are the consequences of prevailing wickedness, love to our country will lament, not only the calamities themselves, but especially the vices, which operate to the introduction of them. "If ye will not hear," says the prophet to the impenitent Jews, "my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, and mine eyes shall run down with tears."

2. This principle will restrain us from injuring, and prompt us to serve our country. "Love works no ill." "By love we serve one another."

All vice and immorality tend to the common misery. In proportion as iniquity abounds, the publick prosperity is endangered. Consequently every vicious man is bringing evil on his country. If his vices do not affect the general happiness immediately, yet they may do it remotely, by corrupting the manners of others. No man is so inconsiderable, but that, by an evil example, he may destroy much good. The friend of his country will, on a principle of love, abstain from every species of vice and impiety.

And on the other hand, he will practise every social virtue.

If he is called to a publick station, he will be faithful there, remembering, that he is exalted, not for himself, but for others; that his country has a demand upon him, which he is bound to pay; that she is not a servant to him, but he is a servant to her; that he is vested with authority, not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

If he acts in a private station, he will be careful to fill his humble sphere. He will live in all godliness and honesty; cheerfully bear his part of public burdens; contribute to the support of reasonable government; yield obedience to just and good laws; give his voice for the promotion of such men as he believes are qualified, by their virtues and abilities, to lead in society; and will use his influence for the general encouragement of religion.

As piety is the foundation of social virtue, he will pay due reverence to those sacred institutions, which are the means of bringing men to the knowledge of God and preserving a sense of his supreme government. In this view, he will honor the sabbath, and the ordinances of divine worship, know-

ing them to be the instituted means of piety toward God, and of righteousness and benevolence to men. This leads me to observe,

3. A lover of his country has an affection for the church of God, and a concern to promote its credit and interest.

The centurion shewed his love to the nation by building a synagogue. It cannot be doubted, that he attended at the synagogue too. He was a friend to religion; thus he shewed himself a friend to the nation. David says, "Because of the house of the Lord, I will seek thy good." He regarded his own country above all others, because the church of God was there. In this appeared Moses's patriotism. "He chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." He esteemed the reproach of Christ, greater riches than the treasures in Egypt."

Christ is head over all things for the church. He has promised to preserve her against all the assaults of her enemies. He orders the dispensations of his providence in reference to her good; for her reformation, when she is corrupt; for her security, when she reforms. "As many as I love," says he, "I rebuke and chasten: Be zealous therefore and repent." A people so far degenerated, as to despise the means of reformation, soon lose their spiritual privileges, and, with them, their national security.

The church of God among a people, as long as she maintains her purity, is their strongest bulwark. "Beautiful for situation is mount Zion, the joy of the whole earth. God is known in her palaces for a refuge." But when she so far conforms to the manners of the world, as to cease to be a church of God, she falls under that awful threatening, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

Since religion is so necessary to the happiness of civil society, an enemy to the former cannot be a friend to the latter. He who treats revelation with contempt; he who tramples on divine institutions; he who encourages vice and impiety by his example and conversation, does more to undermine the national security, than, by any other means, he can do to establish it.

4. Love to our country will express itself in prayers for her prosperity. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," says the Psalmist, "they prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces." The apostle directs, that "prayers be made for all men," and particularly "for them who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life.—This is acceptable in the sight of God." Prayer is a proper expression of our benevolence to men, as well as of our piety to God. If we believe that there is an allwise, and almighty Governour, who superintends the affairs of nations, we must believe it to be his will, that we should apply to him for national blessings and protections, as well as for personal supports and mercies.

I have illustrated the nature and operations of love to our country. I now ask your attention to some reflections which result from the subject.

1. True patriotism is a nobler attainment than some seem to imagine.

It includes compassion for the unhappy, hatred of sin, love of virtue, disinterestedness, selfdenial, industry, prudence, piety and devotion; yea, every thing that is excellent and amiable. It is not an empty sound, but a solid virtue, or rather an assemblage of virtues. It is not a philosophical parade, but a christian grace; yea, a collection of graces.

Though the gospel has not enjoined the love of our country, in these very words, yet it has abundantly

inculcated the thing itself. It requires us to love our neighbours, our brethren, our enemies, and all men; and to look not only at our own things, but also at the things of others.

2. There is a great difference between talking warmly in our country's favour, and really loving it.

A man may say much in the praise of his country, its constitution, trade, soil and climate, and give it the preference to all other countries; he may plead for its rights with great earnestness, and do much to support its credit and respectability; and yet not be a real lover of it—not have any pure benevolence, any piety to God, or regard to virtue; but be influenced wholly by ambition and avarice; he may still practise those vices, which, if they should generally prevail, would bring national misery and ruin. Balaam could not be hired to curse Israel. He said the finest things of the nation.—"God hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, nor seen perverseness in Israel. Blessed is every one that blesseth them, and cursed is every one that curseth them." Was not he a friend to God's people?—Follow him a little farther, and you will see. Though he would not assist their destruction by a prophetic execration, yet he told their enemy, how he might bring on them an efficacious curse. He taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before them, by which they would fall into fornication and idolatry. This advice was more fatal, in its consequences, than a hundred formal execrations would have been. It was the means of involving them in such guilt, as could not be expiated without the death of multitudes. Every man who is a promoter of wickedness is an enemy to his country. He contributes to its disgrace and misery. Did not Achan sin in the accursed thing? but that man perished not alone in his iniquity.

3. It appears from our subject, that a people, who enjoy, and profess to believe divine revelation, ought to make some stated provision for maintaining and preserving the social worship of the Deity.

This is a plain dictate of reason, as well as scripture. As God has made mankind to subsist in a state of society, every thing which is in its nature, necessary to the welfare of society, must be approved by him. Every one knows, that society cannot be continued, much less be happy, without some degree of virtue, and without a general restraint on men's selfish passions and vicious inclinations. The first and principal object in every society must be, to prevent, or restrain injustice, oppression, sensuality, idleness and dissoluteness of manners; and to encourage and support righteousness, sobriety, industry, and all those virtues, which tend to the happiness of individuals, and of the community.—Now there are but two ways in which this design can be effected. It must be either by light and reason; or, by force and terror. And which is most consistent with the liberty and dignity of rational beings; to govern them by stripes and gibbets, prisons and workhouses; or, to govern them by conviction and persuasion, argument and motive? If mankind ought to be governed, not as slaves, but freemen—not as brutes, but moral agents, then provision ought to be made for the diffusion of necessary knowledge, and especially of the knowledge of religion, which offers the grand motives to every social and private virtue. There ought to be schools for the instruction and education of youth. There ought also to be some standing means of more publick and general instruction in the great principles and duties of religion. Every one knows that the belief of the being and providence of God, and the apprehension of a future state of retribution, are the grand principles of all virtue. And it is also evident, that the publick, social worship of God

is the best, and the only effectual mean of maintaining and diffusing among a people this apprehension and belief. If then there were no such thing as the gospel, it would still be the duty and interest of every community, to provide means for promoting the knowledge of *natural* religion; such as the being and government of God, a future retribution, the nature and necessity of virtue, its tendency to the happiness of society and of particular persons, and the miserable consequences of vice; because such provision would be a more cheap, rational and liberal way of governing mankind, than any other that can be imagined.

Civil magistrates have no right to dictate men's belief, or control their consciences. But the worship of the Deity, and the obligations of virtue, are contrary to no man's conscience. He who has any religion at all, acknowledges *these*. He who has no religion, and believes none, can have no conscience in the matter.

It appears then, that the gospel, properly speaking, never costs men any thing; for it calls them to do nothing more, than, as members of society, they are bound to do; and, as good members of society, they would be inclined to do, if the gospel had never come to them.

If, in a social and civil view, they would be bound to maintain publick teachers, who should explain and inculcate the principles and duties of *natural* religion, What grievance is it that the gospel requires them to maintain *christian* teachers? The gospel instructs us in all those truths and virtues, which belong to natural religion, and which are necessary to the good of society in the present state. Has it injured us in pointing out a way to heaven through a Redeemer, in promising pardon to sinners on repentance, and in offering grace to help our infirmities?

The reason why some doubt, whether civil rulers should concern themselves in the support of religion, is, because it is a matter which relates to men's souls. And indeed, considered simply in this view, it must be merely a matter of private judgment in which the civil powers are not to interfere. But so far as it relates to the good of society, rulers ought to encourage and support this as well as any thing else, which relates to the same end.

They who deny, that rulers have any thing to do in religious matters, will find themselves involved in absurdity and contradiction. For, on their ground, it will follow, that there must be no laws against vice, or in favor of virtue, no laws against theft, oppression, drunkenness, idleness and profanity; or in favour of industry, charity, righteousness and sobriety. For such laws have relation to matters, which essentially concern religion. If we allow, that there may be laws to regulate our social manners, we grant the whole matter in question; because our social manners are immediately connected with religion. And if these are to be regulated, it will follow, that the worship of the Deity, the observance of the sabbath, and an attendance on the acknowledged institutions of heaven, are to be encouraged and supported; because these are the best and surest means of promoting social virtue and happiness.

4. If we ought to regard the interest of our country at large, we ought, for the same reasons, to consult the peace and happiness of the smaller societies of which we are members.

The same principles, which ought to govern nations, ought also to govern those societies, into which nations are subdivided. The apostle's instruction should be religiously observed in all our social conduct, "Let nothing be done through strife, or vain glory; but, in lowliness of mind, let each

esteem other better than himself." In all communities, there will often be a diversity of sentiment, and a collision of interest. Peace and happiness will therefore depend on candor and condescension.

In civil society we must never pursue our own supposed interest in a manner evidently prejudicial to the general welfare. In religious society, we must never, in circumstantial things, so stiffly adhere to our peculiar sentiments, as to deprive others of the means of edification in things essential. For the convenience of social worship, it is necessary that christians should be formed into particular churches. When a church is formed, the members, however divided in sentiment about smaller things, should, with united affection, pursue the great objects in which they are agreed; and should so far condescend to one another, that they may, with one mind, and one mouth, glorify God.

If the whole society is but just competent to the maintenance of publick worship, the consequence of divisions is, that none will enjoy the privilege. If a part institute a mode of worship by themselves, with an intention to exclude their brethren, they render that a burden, which to the whole united would be easy; and in the issue deprive the whole of a privilege, which all wish to enjoy. Let none therefore seek merely to please himself, but let every one please his neighbour for his good to edification.

5. We see how careful we should be, that no selfish or unworthy motive influence our social, or religious conduct.

The elders of the Jews, when they asked of Jesus a favour for the centurion, added, "He is worthy for whom thou shouldst do this, for he loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue." They expressed their sense, that a spirit of benevolence, and a regard to the general interest of religion, were

proper qualifications for divine favours. Christ complies with the request thus urged; and by his compliance confirms the justness of the sentiment. A man no farther acts as a member of society, than he is guided by benevolence; and his devotions are no farther acceptable, than charity mingles itself with them. Be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer; dan, above all things, have fervent charity among yourselves.

SERMON XIV.

The Influence of Religion to enlarge the Mind.

2 CORINTHIANS, vi, 13.

Now for a recompense in the same, (I speak as unto my Children) be ye also enlarged.

OF this enlargedness of mind, which the apostle recommends to the Corinthians, he himself was an eminent example. All his worldly honours, interests and prospects he cheerfully relinquished, for the service of Christ in preaching the gospel of salvation. In the prosecution of this work, he was not confined to the places, where he found it most lucrative to himself; he rather chose to bestow his labour, where it seemed most necessary for others. In the churches of Macedonia he was received with much cordiality, and treated with singular kindness. They not only contributed to his support while he was among them, but ministered to his necessities, when he was absent from them. Alluding to their liberality, he says to the Corinthians, "I robbed other churches, taking wages of

them, to do you service." In Corinth, a place of great opulence, he found little of this liberal spirit. And such was the opposition which he met with from false apostles, that he declined to receive the scanty supplies which were offered him. He says, "I have kept myself from being burthensome to you, and so will I keep myself. Notwithstanding the liberality of other churches, and the parsimony of this, he here bestowed a great part of his labours, both in preaching and in writing. In this chapter, after a detail of his labours and sufferings in the cause of the gospel, he, with great pathos and earnestness, addresses himself to his Corinthian brethren; "O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you; our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us; but ye are straitened in your own bowels. Now for a recompense in the same, be ye also enlarged."

What the apostle here recommends is an *enlarged* mind, in opposition to a *straitened, contracted* mind.

We will illustrate this *enlarged mind*, in its nature and operations; and then shew the proper *means* of obtaining it.

I. The nature and operations of an *enlarged mind* are first to be considered.

The apostle evidently intends, by the phrase, some eminent measure of a virtuous and holy temper.

1. The christian of an enlarged mind entertains comprehensive and connected ideas of the religion of the gospel, and regards the several parts of it, according to their comparative usefulness and importance.

There are some, who profess a zeal for religion, but confine their zeal to a few particular things, to certain favourite sentiments and usages; and these not the most important in the christian scheme, if

they in any sense belong to it. Among many of the primitive believers an attachment to the rites and ceremonies, in which they had been educated, almost excluded benevolence and charity to their more liberal brethren. On this account, the apostle calls them weak in faith—babes in Christ. They might have honest intentions, but they had not consistent ideas of the nature of the gospel.

The enlarged christian imbibes his religious sentiments fresh and pure from the deep fountain of divine truth, not from the shallow, variable stream of human opinion. Regarding the Deity as the great object to which all religion is directed, he proves what is acceptable to him.

Contemplating the perfect character of God, he concludes, that all religion must consist in rectitude of heart and holiness of life—that love to him, and benevolence to men must be its leading principles—and that to purify the heart, and promote the works of righteousness, must be the great end of all the doctrines and institutions of the gospel. He despises not the least command; but he principally attends to the things which make the substance of religion; and, in subservience to these, he honours every ordinance which he finds to be sanctioned by divine authority.

2. The enlarged christian, in matters of religion, judges *freely* and *independently*.

There are some, who, with unthinking indolence, take their religious sentiments as they are dictated by others. In opposition to this implicit credulity, our Saviour says, "Call no man your Father, on earth, for one is your Father, who is in heaven." An attention is due to the opinions of wise and good men. But we are to give no man dominion over our faith. The Bereans were commended, because they received, with all readiness of mind,

the doctrines taught by the apostles, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.

The christian of a large and liberal mind will not receive doctrines, as the commandments of men; nor, on the other hand, will he cavil and object against them, to shew his superiority to the opinions of men. The latter discovers as much pride and selfconceit, as the former discovers indolence and carelessness; and it is difficult to say, which is most inconsistent with an open and generous soul.

3. The enlarged mind yields an unreserved submission to the divine government.

To the man, whose views are contracted within himself, the ways of God are subjects of daily complaint. As he has no higher aim than his own worldly interest, so he has no higher wish, than to find that providence makes him its favourite. Disappointments vex him, poverty mortifies him, the prosperity of others torments him; for he sees no reason, why they should be more happy, and more successful than himself.

The man of an enlarged heart contemplates the ways of God on a more extensive scale. He does not consider himself as the only object of the divine care, nor the present life as the only term of his existence, nor this world as made and governed merely for his use. He looks up to God as a Being of unsearchable wisdom and unbounded goodness, whose government extends to all creatures, and whose designs reach forward to the remotest ages of futurity. He believes that there is a secret connexion in all God's dispensations, and feels himself incompetent to judge what will best promote the general interest, or even his own. He considers, that the temporary evils which *he* suffers, may be productive of lasting good to *others*; that the worldly prosperity, which he sometimes desires, might, if granted, operate to the prejudic

of many; and that his present afflictions may, in ways unknown and unsuspected, turn to his own eternal benefit. He therefore acquiesces in all the allotments of providence, and rejoices that his interests are in better hands than his own.

4. The enlarged christian is of a *humble* mind.

The man of a narrow, illiberal heart, thinks highly of his own worth, is tenacious of his own opinions, and devoted to his own interest. Vainly puffed up with a fleshly mind, he assumes airs of importance, magnifies his own works, and depreciates the virtues of others. But the man of enlarged and liberal sentiments thinks soberly, speaks modestly and walks humbly. He considers himself as only a single being in the immense creation of God. Contemplating the infinity of the Creator, the extent and variety of his works, and the countless myriads of superiour intelligences, which wait around him, he sinks into nothing in his own estimation. Yea; when he recollects the many instances of eminent virtue and wisdom, which have appeared among the human race, he dares not exalt himself above his fellow mortals; but is rather disposed to think others better than himself. From an enlarged view of the Creator and his works, the pious Psalmist was led to the most abasing thoughts of man. "O Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who hast set thy glory above the heavens? When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars, which thou hast ordained. What is man, that thou art mindful of him; and the Son of man, that thou visitest him?"

Influenced by this spirit of humility, the christian reveres the word of revelation, and receives with submission its heavenly instructions. Every high thing within him, which exalts itself against the knowledge of God is brought low, and every

thought is captivated to the obedience of Christ. He values the counsels of his friends, and listens to their faithful reproofs; and is ever ready, on conviction, to change his sentiments, and amend his conduct; to retract his errors and confess his faults.

5. The enlarged heart is a *benevolent* heart.

"We are poor," says the apostle, "yet make many rich; we have nothing, yet possess all things —our heart is enlarged."

He, whose feelings are contracted within himself, views with indifference the misfortunes of a neighbour, he rather watches to make some advantage from them, than studies how to relieve them. But the enlarged christian considers all men as his fellow creatures, partakers of the same nature, and subject to the same sensations with himself. From what he suffers, he realizes what they suffer in similar circumstances. It is one of his highest pleasures to abate the miseries, and advance the happiness of those around him. Every act of beneficence to the needy returns back to himself, bringing the reward of homefelt satisfaction.

His goodness is not confined to friends and favourites, to this religious sect or that political party; but extends to all as there is opportunity. Like the good Samaritan, he can shew mercy to the distressed, though they are of another nation, and of a different religion; yea, though, in time past, they have been his enemies.

He can do good to those from whom he expects no recompense; for he looks for his recompense in the gratification of his own benevolence, and in the approbation of his God.

Among his fellow christians he maintains an obliging candour. Conscious of imperfection in himself, he looks for perfection in none; and sensible of his need of candour from his brethren, he shews

that they may expect it from him. He will not hastily condemn them for every error in sentiment, or renounce communion with them for every diversity of usage; but wherein he finds them agreeing with him, he will walk by the same rule; and wherein they are differently minded, he prays that God will reveal even this unto them.

He will not resent every inadvertent action or expression, though it may seem exceptionable; but will make allowance for the common infirmities of human nature, and for the peculiar weaknesses and temptations of particular persons.

Real injuries he can forgive on moderate terms. And knowing how forward selflove is to magnify the injuries which it receives, and to palliate those which it commits, he is careful, in cases of variance, not to state too high the conditions of peace.

He can sacrifice his own interest to the superior happiness of his fellow men, like saint Paul, who sought not his own profit, but the profit of many that they might be saved.

He does not view as lost all the blessings, which are dispersed among the human race, nor wish to grasp them with his own hands. He desires the happiness of all men, and with pleasure beholds his fellow creatures rejoicing under the smiles of providence. His neighbour's fruitful field and plentiful harvest, peaceful mansion and contented aspect, refresh and cheer his heart. He takes a sensible share in the blessings, which they enjoy, and is happy in their prosperity.

He readily acknowledges the kindnesses which are done him. He can more easily forgive an injury, than forget a favour. Injuries, he knows, may proceed from accident, inadvertence, or transient passion, without settled malice or deliberate intention; but favours are usually the effects of a kind and friendly disposition; and the smallest kind-

ness done with good will, is rather to be acknowledged, than the greatest injury done by accident, is to be resented. The enlarged mind marks this difference; and while it passes over many injuries without serious resentment, it will let no favour stand unnoticed.

The man of enlarged views cultivates a good opinion of mankind. When he thinks most favourably of them, he best enjoys himself. Their virtues he had rather notice than their failings. For the former he gives them full credit; the latter he wishes to extenuate and excuse.

Perverse as mankind are, he finds, that, while he acts well himself, he can, for the most part, live peaceably with them. And bad as the world is, he, in the course of his business, meets more honest men than knaves; and is oftener treated with justice, than defrauded of his rights.

If he is sometimes defamed, yet while he provides things honest in the sight of all men, his character is generally safe. He is oftener commended for worthy actions, than slandered for suspected faults.

How much soever some complain of their neighbours, every man finds it better to live in society, than in solitude. No man chooses to retire from the world, and confine himself to a hermitage. Every one therefore must be presumed to receive more good than evil from those around him.

The man of a large and liberal mind, thus viewing the state of the world, and the dispositions of mankind, embraces in the arms of his benevolence the whole human race, and those especially with whom he has intercourse and connexion: He does good as he has opportunity; and the good which he receives, he thankfully remembers and cheerfully requites.

These are the operations of a heart enlarged.

II. We proposed, in the second place, to consider the proper means of obtaining and improving this liberality and largeness of mind.

1. The first thing, which here offers itself to our thoughts, is an intimate acquaintance with the holy scriptures.

All moral excellency and mental improvement have their foundation in knowledge. It is not, however, any and every kind of knowledge that will enlarge the mind. One may indulge his curiosity in prying into the affairs of his neighbours, and the secret transactions of families; he may studiously acquaint himself with a thousand trifles which have no relation to his duty as a christian, or his business as a man; and after all his frivolous acquisitions, be more straitened and contracted than he was before. The knowledge which enlarges the soul, is that which is great in its object, and useful in its tendency.

In this view the reading of history is very important, especially to the young. Thus they recall the years, which have gone by, and bring past events to be present. They run back to distant ages, converse with those who lived on this globe long before *they* had a being. They learn what were the sentiments, manners and pursuits of men, thousands of years ago; see the gradual progress of arts and civilization; perceive the difference between the rude ages of antiquity, and the periods of modern refinement; and contemplate human nature in its various forms and attitudes. Hence they discern plain proofs of a governing Providence, gain conviction of human depravity, remark the absurdities of heathen mythology, and are led to conclude the necessity of divine revelation in order to just and rational sentiments of God and religion.

But there is no reading so immediately conducive to the enlargement of the mind, as that of the holy scriptures.

We all have this book in our hands, have early been accustomed to read it, have been taught some of its contents from our cradles, and we forget its sacred importance. If it had come to us suddenly, as a new discovery, and with the sanction of divine authority, we should open it with eagerness, and read it with astonishment.

The idea of a book dictated by the inspiration of God, for the instruction of mortals, is a grand and noble conception. It leads us to view the Deity as a Being of wonderful condescension; and mankind as sustaining an important rank among his creatures.

The matters contained in this volume are the most interesting that can be imagined.

The subjects of common history are often entertaining and affecting; but compared with some of the subjects which the bible exhibits to us, they appear small and trifling.

Vulgar history gives us the character of kings and emperors, statesmen and heroes, and details to us their great actions, and mighty atchievements. But the scriptures exhibit the character, and describe the government of that infinite, eternal, all perfect Being, before whom princes are nothing, and the judges of the earth are vanity.

History relates the rise and fall, the changes and revolutions of states and kingdoms. But the scriptures inform us, how worlds rose out of chaos into being and order; and how they will, in some future period, be dissolved, and pass away.

History gives us an account of the first settlement and gradual population of particular countries. But the Bible has chosen a grander theme. It teaches us the first beginning, and the early increase of the human race, and the manner in which the world

was peopled from one created pair. Yea, it rises above this globe; it ascends to the skies; it brings us intelligence of important things in the invisible world; such as the creation, offices and employments of angels and spirits, the apostasy of multitudes of these superior beings, the condition into which they are fallen, and the end to which they are reserved.

History informs us of great changes, which have happened in particular countries, by means of foreign invasions, or internal rebellions. But the scriptures instruct us, how our whole race have departed from God, and what is the awful consequence of this universal defection. They at the same time, discover to us a divine Saviour, who assumed human flesh, appeared in this world, exhibited a pattern of virtue, taught a system of important truths, died a sacrifice for the guilt of men, and rose from the dead as the first fruits of a general resurrection, and a pledge of eternal life to them who believe.

History gives us a description of the earth, the genius of its inhabitants, the produce of its climates, and the policies of its kingdoms. But the book of God discovers to us a world, which mortal eye hath not seen. It describes the riches and glories of the heavenly state, the employments of its inhabitants, and the qualifications necessary to our obtaining a settlement among them.

If any knowledge is of use to elevate the mind, the knowledge of the scriptures is the most useful; for these bring to us things of the highest nature and most interesting consequence, things which relate, not to particular nations or ages only; but to the world, to other worlds, to all mankind in all the ages of eternity.

2. That we may be enlarged, it is necessary that we submit to the power of the gospel, and feel its influence on our hearts.

Knowledge is highly useful; but this alone will rather swell, than enlarge the mind. It is charity which edifies.

We often see men of learned education, and extensive knowledge, who are still contracted in their views, and illiberal in their sentiments. And we sometimes see men of moderate erudition, who discover an amiable generosity and openness of mind. The former have sought knowledge for worldly ends, and devoted their acquirements to the low purposes of ambition and covetousness. The latter have studied the gospel of Christ, that they might understand its nature and feel its influence; and their knowledge has made them better men—more humble in their thoughts of themselves—more liberal in their sentiments of their fellow christians—and more benevolent to all men.

The insufficiency of knowledge alone, and the efficacy of real religion to enlarge the mind, we see in the apostle Paul. Let us view this man in the two different periods of his life; the one before, and the other after, he became a christian.

Paul was a man of superior natural abilities, and literary accomplishments. He received as good an education as his country afforded. He was conversant with the writings of Moses and the prophets. He was well acquainted with the rites and forms of his religion, and with the ancient predictions concerning a Saviour to come. And from several passages in his writings it appears, that he had read the most celebrated poets and philosophers. But with all his fine talents and distinguished knowledge, Paul was still a bigot. He had an illiberal contracted spirit. He gloried in his Hebrew blood, in his descent from Abraham, in his circumcision on the appointed day, in his pharisean principles, and in his strict observance of the legal ceremonies; and on these grounds he built his hopes of salva-

tion. He had a zeal for religion, but it was a fierce, unmerciful zeal; a zeal which stimulated him to persecute the church of Christ and waste it. The salvation of God he limited to his own country—to his own proud sect. The rest of mankind he consigned over to destruction. His soul, thus contracted by pride, selfconceit and false zeal, could not receive the rays of divine light, which shone around him. The benevolent doctrines of Jesus had no charms to captivate his darkened mind. The miracles of the Son of God had no power to convince his obstinate heart. He breathed out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.

Paul, in the height of his persecuting rage, was arrested by a divine hand. Such glaring evidence was poured in upon him, as overcame his prejudices, and convinced him, that the gospel was from heaven. He received it as divinely excellent, and bowed to its authority.

From this time you see him quite a different man. His mind is enlarged by the religion, which he has embraced, and all his conduct speaks the benevolence of his heart.

He no longer considers God, as the God of Jews only: He adores him as the God of Gentiles, as rich in mercy to all who call upon him, and as governing the world without respect of persons. He believes that the Messiah came, not to exalt Jews to dominion over other nations; but to bring salvation to a guilty world. He now can sacrifice all his temporal prospects to the spiritual interest of his fellow men, not seeking his own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. He reckons not his own life dear to himself, that he may fulfil the ministry appointed him, and finish his course with joy. What things were gain to him, these now he esteems loss for Christ. While he

keeps under his body, lest he should be a castaway, he is made all things to all men, that he may by all means save some. All his preaching breathes condescension and goodness. There is nothing in it to encourage stiffness and obstinacy among christians; but every thing to molify the passions, sweeten the spirits and smooth the manners. He entertains the most liberal views of the purposes of God's grace. The grace manifested in *his* conversion, he celebrates in terms of high admiration, because it was designed, not for his sake only, but rather for the general good of mankind. He gives thanks for the success of the gospel in particular places; because hence the riches of God's grace would be known in places remote, and in ages to come. He admires the dispensation of divine mercy to guilty men; because hereby the manifold wisdom of God would be more clearly seen in heavenly places. He regards all men, and all moral beings, as one family, one grand community, under Jesus their head. He wishes to see christians all united in love, and studying the things which make for the common salvation.

That which made so mighty a change in Paul, was the cordial reception of the gospel. As soon as this began to operate in his heart, his views were enlarged—his prospects were extended—his benevolence stretched wider and wider its arms, until it embraced the whole system of rational creatures. The man, who like Paul, would enlarge his mind, must not content himself with a cold, speculative belief of the gospel; but cultivate in his heart the spirit and genius of Christ's religion.

3. The enlargement of the mind depends much on social intercourse, especially on social worship.

He who withdraws himself from the world, will be apt to think of his fellow men worse than they deserve. The prophet Elijah, in his gloomy cave,

pronounced all men his enemies, and grew weary of life. God calls him to come forth, mingle with mankind, and attend the duties of his office; assuring him, that, corrupt as the nation was, there were many good men remaining. Abraham, before he conversed with the people of Gerar, thought surely the fear of God was not in that place; but, on acquaintance, he found in it piety enough to rebuke *his* misconduct.

By performing the duties of social life, we strengthen and improve the social affections. In conversing with mankind, we meet with many agreeable characters; see many worthy actions; receive many instructive sentiments, which, otherwise, would have escaped our notice. By the reciprocal exchange of good offices we become interested in each other's happiness.

In this view, *religious* society is of great utility. When christians statedly assemble together to invoke the same Father, in the name of the same Mediator, and unite their voices in imploring the same blessings, each for his fellow worshippers, as well as for himself, they consider themselves as a fraternity, all standing in the same relation to God, and all related to one another. Feeling each other's wants, and rejoicing in each other's prosperity, they almost forget the distinctions of interest. The church of Christ is one; all particular churches are members of the same general community; and all should endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, and by love serve one another.

The breast, in which christian love dwells, must be enlarged. There is no place for it with those who are straitened in their own bowels; for this affection does not confine its regards to a particular sect or society, it embraces all churches of the saints.

Nothing is more inconsistent with enlargedness of heart, than a customary neglect of social worship. It has often been observed, that they who withdraw from the assemblies of the saints, contract an unsocial sourness toward mankind, a suspicious distrust of their neighbours, and disaffection to those around them; or else they run into sentiments of infidelity and irreligion.

And it is obvious to every one, that those christians, who, either through mistaken zeal, or accidental disgust, separate from their brethren, and form new sects, soon lose that liberality and enlargedness of heart, which are among the beauties and glories of religion. They persuade themselves to believe, and allow themselves to speak, of their fellow christians, many unkind and unfavourable things, which, if they would mingle with them, they would know to be without foundation.

Honest christians may think differently. But, if once they begin to magnify their differences into causes of disunion, they will soon come to condemn, perhaps to hate one another. Let them walk together, hand in hand, and maintain fellowship in the things in which they are agreed; and they will easily see that the things in which they differ are but small, compared with the other.

The animosities between different sects of christians are much increased by their standing at a distance. If they would mingle in the civil and religious life, they would see, that religion is not confined to any one sect, but may be found in others, as well as their own.

4. *Prayer* is of great use to enlarge the mind.

This is a sacred converse with God. It is the opening of our desires and feelings to him. It is an exercise well adapted to raise our hearts above this world, and elevate our affections to divine and heavenly objects. Will the christian, who has

been employed in communion with his God, immediately return to the vanities and follies of the world? Will he at once forget where he has been, what he has been doing, and the high privilege, which he has enjoyed? By a regular devotion, we set God always before us, and live in his presence. How grand and solemn the thought, that we are surrounded with the Deity, and filled with his fulness—that his eye observes our ways, and his counsel guides our steps—that his ear attends our requests, and his bounty supplies our wants?

Converse with God supposes a belief of his providence. If we believe that he is good to us, we must believe that he is also good to others. And if our fellow men are objects of his care, as well as we, they ought to be objects of our benevolence, as well as we of theirs.

From that universal providence, which prayer acknowledges, we are led to view all men as our brethren, belonging to the same household with us. We are taught that we must pray for all men, for this is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour. We must then wish well to all; otherwise our prayers will contradict the sentiments of our hearts.

Thus prayer enlarges the soul, exalts our thoughts of God and his providence, and extends the circle of our benevolence to all his creatures.

From what has been said, we see that many have mistaken ideas of real greatness of mind.

Do you imagine, that you discover an enlarged soul, when you throw off the fear of God and a future judgment—when you trample on the precepts and spurn the threatenings of scripture—when you despise what your serious neighbours revere—when you set up your reason in opposition to revelation, and your humour in opposition to divine institutions? Do you call it greatness of mind, to rise into high resentment for trifling wrongs—to utter pas-

sionate language when you receive an offence—to revenge an injury and revile an enemy?—You greatly mistake the matter. Piety and submission to God, humility and modesty in your language and deportment, meekness and condescension when offences happen, goodness and benevolence to all men; these are the things which indicate an enlarged mind. Pride, passion, revenge, precipitancy and contentious zeal, discover a low, small, contracted soul. The glory and greatness of the divine character are goodness and mercy. The dignity of man is likeness to God.

Our subject teaches us, that the gospel is a most noble institution, wherever it comes with power, it mends the heart and adorns the life; makes men more useful to others, more agreeable in all relations, more capable of enjoying themselves. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.

We learn farther, that the gospel bears plain marks of a divine original. Wherever it produces its proper effect, it enlarges the heart, elevates the affections, inspires with unbounded benevolence, and makes men like to God. So divine a religion must have a divine original. Wisdom, so pure and peaceable, so full of mercy and good fruits, must be wisdom from above.

He who believes, has the witness in himself. Having experienced the transforming power of the gospel on his own heart, he feels an unwavering conviction that it is from God.

The man, who rejects the gospel of Christ, as a human invention, has never known its divine efficacy. He is a stranger to that humility, meekness, condescension, benevolence and heavenliness, which it uniformly inculcates, and in which greatness of mind consists. The more the soul is enlarged, the more it will be delivered from, and secured against, sceptical thoughts.

You who complain of doubts and unbelief, sit down and enquire, Whether you have ever submitted to the government of Christ's religion? If you regard it only as a matter of speculation, no wonder that the tempter throws doubts in your way. If you regard it as matter of practice, and cultivate the temper of it in your hearts, you will feel its excellence and importance. Continue in Christ's word, and you are his disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

SERMON XV.

The Changing Nature of worldly Things.

1. CORINTHIANS, vii. 31.

———*The fashion of this World passeth away.*

THE mutable and transient nature of all things around us, is here adduced as an argument against depression in adversity, and exultation in prosperity, eagerness in our worldly pursuits, and anxiety obout future events. "The time is short," says the apostle, "it remaineth, that they who weep, be as if they wept not; they who rejoice, as if they rejoiced not; they who buy, as if they possessed not; they who use the world, as not abusing it: *For the fashion of this world passeth away.*"

To illustrate and improve this thought, is the design of the present discourse.

All things around us are changing.

The visible heavens daily vary their appearance, and present to us different scenes. The stars, which now exhibit themselves to our view, are not the same which a few months ago, adorned our evening hemisphere; but another assemblage, which have come in their place, and which will again give

place to them. The moon, from evening to evening, changes her face: At one time she appears full orbed, and soon hides herself in darkness.

The sun approaches us with his lively beams and gives us summer; then, retiring toward the other pole, he leaves us to feel our dependence on his friendly visits, and to realize how intolerable would be our state if he should too long delay his return.

Spring and summer, autumn and winter, walk their rounds, and follow each other in close succession. None of them abide with us long. Each in his turn just appears, makes a transient visit, and, stepping forward on his way, gives room to the next.

In every season we experience a great variety in the temperature of the air, the course and strength of the winds, and the aspect of the skies. Cool winds mitigate the fierce heat of the summer's sun; and warm breezes, now and then, soften the rigour of the winter's frost. Thus each season is comfortable in its mean, and tolerable in its extremes.

Nature is continually diversifying her dress. We see her at one time, clothed with verdure, and enriched with fruitage; then despoiled of her ornaments and treasures, veiled with snow, and deformed with frost.

For a few months she teems with life; the groves and fields, the grass and flowers, the very air, all are peopled with living myriads. These, for a few days, play in the summer's beams: "But God hides his face, and they are troubled: He takes away their breath, and they die and return to their dust. Again he sendeth forth his spirit, and they are created: He renoweth the face of the earth."

Time makes observable changes in the surface of our globe. By the washing of rains, mountains are wasting and valleys are filling. By subterraneous winds and fires, new mountains are heaved up,

and new valleys are sunk. In one place, the land encroaches on the sea; in another, the sea makes inroads on the land. By the power of tempests and tides, islands are united to continents, and continents are dismembered to form new islands. Rivers and streams forsake their old beds, and force now channels. Forests decay in one place, and grow up in another; and, in a tract of time, a different species succeeds in the place where the old forest was destroyed.

Every age introduces great alterations in the bounds of empires, in the political and commercial interests of nations, in their forms of government, in their enmities and friendships. In our own country, What a vast extent of wilderness has been populated within a few years? How prodigiously have our numbers increased? How wonderfully have arts, commerce and learning been improved? What an astonishing revolution have we seen? The state of Europe is also much changed, and still is changing. A few years may perhaps produce far greater alterations, than have yet taken place. The day is coming, "when iniquity will have an end, and the profane and wicked prince will be put down. The crown will be taken from his head, and the diadem will be removed. And God will exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. The government of nations he will overturn, overturn, overturn; and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is, and it shall be given to him."

Families, as well as nations, are changing. New ones are forming as elder ones pass away. They remain not long at a stand; when they have reached their growth, they soon begin to decline. Some of the members are removed by death; and others are scattered, here and there, to form new households. Some families, in two or three generations, are multiplied into a number; others are extinguished.

The lands which have been acquired, and the property which has been accumulated, by the prudence, industry and enterprise of the proprietor, are often alienated by the misfortune, or folly of the descendants. Estates rarely continue long in the same line, or in the same name. What is collected by the hands of one, is dispersed by the next hands into which it falls. No man can ensure to his posterity the acquisitions of his own industry; nor can he tell who shall be after him. Riches are often kept for the owners to their hurt, and those riches perish by evil travel.

The condition of every person is in continual mutation. We come into the world helpless and dependent: We increase in stature, strength and understanding, until we attain to our maturity: Soon we begin to decline in all our powers: We return to the weakness of infancy, and sink into the dust.

As we advance in life, our views and apprehensions of men and things, and our taste and inclination for the objects around us, greatly alter. The things which we relished in youth, we despise when we come to manhood. The pleasures of our mature age become insipid in our declining years. In the world to come, all earthly interests and pursuits will alike be objects of our contempt.

The inhabitants of the world are changing. The rational beings who people it now, a few years ago had not an existence; and those who will people it a few years hence, have not an existence now. The race of mortals is like the river, which rolls by us. From year to year, it has the same general appearance, is bounded nearly by the same banks, flows in the same course, and is called by the same name; But the water is continued by succession: That which passes by us this hour, is not the same which

passed an hour ago, or will pass an hour hence. So changes the stream of *human* succession. Every hour some of our mortal race are passing away, and others are coming forward, to follow them down the current into that boundless ocean, where all will, by and by, be absorbed.

There is a mighty change which awaits us all; a change which generations before us have experienced, and which is appointed for those who are coming after us. We are to pass from this world, where we now live, where we were born and have grown up, where we have formed connexions, contracted friendships, and acquired property; and we are to enter into another world widely different from this; a world which we have never seen, and of which we have had but imperfect information; a world to which many of our friends have gone, but from which none have returned to tell us what it is. There we must exist in a new manner, and amidst new connexions. Our bodies we must leave behind, for awhile, to receive them in some distant period, new made, and differently fashioned. In the mean time, we shall live unbodied spirits, and among spirits, like us, unbodied. Our views, actions and communications will be such as are proper to spirits, and such as beings, in this gross state of flesh, cannot clearly apprehend. This change will be more important than all preceding ones. The change, from a world known to a world unknown; from an existence in bodies, to an existence without bodies, is inconceivably great. But there is a circumstance in our final change far greater still. It removes us from a state of probation to a state of retribution, where we shall enjoy complete happiness without fear of loss, or suffer extreme misery without hope of deliverance. As the inhabitants of the world, so the world itself is passing away. The heavens and the

earth which are now, are kept in store, reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men. The day of the Lord will come: Then the heavens shall depart as a scroll, when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island shall be removed out of their places, and the earth and the works which are therein shall be burnt up. Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens, and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness.

Let us now improve the sentiment, which we have been illustrating,

1. The mutable condition of the world may lead us to contemplate the immutability of the Creator. "The heavens and the earth shall perish, but he shall endure. They shall wax old as a garment, and as a vesture shall they be changed; but he is the same, and of his years there is no end." It is the nature of the world, to be mutable. It is the will of the Creator, that the fashion of it should pass away. One use of the changes which we see, is to remind us of the unchangeableness of him, by whom all things were made.

These changes prove the existence of one eternal, independent, allperfect Being. The order with which they are guided, and the ends to which they are directed, shew them to be the effects, not of blind chance, but of unerring wisdom. Is it by chance, that the moon waxes and wanes—that the sun approaches and declines—that the seasons follow each other in succession, and give variety to the face of nature—that the numerous tribes of creatures are supplied, and that the millions, which perish at the approach of winter, revive with the returning spring? Is it by chance that revolutions take place in states and kingdoms—that small causes are productive of vast and stupendous

events—and that the counsels of men are defeated by disproportionate means?

The harmony which we behold in the changes of the natural world, and the good effects, which, contrary to human expectation, we often see produced by changes in the political world, are demonstrations, that an infinite, allperfect Being presides in the universe, and directs all changes and events.

This Being must himself be unchangeable. His nature and happiness are not affected by the vicissitudes of time, nor his throne shaken by the convulsions of the world. With him is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. As he is possessed of all perfections, there can be no addition to his glory and felicity. As he is infinite and independent, there can be no diminution of his dignity and excellence. As he has an unlimited knowledge of all things, there can be no change of his purposes and designs. As he is above all, none can restrain his power, or control his will.

When we see all things around us changing, and feel ourselves partaking in the general mutability of the creatures, it is matter of high consolation, that the Being, who governs the world, is ever the same, and that all changes among the creatures are under his direction. "He looketh down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven doth he behold the earth. He heareth the groaning of the afflicted, and regardeth the prayer of the destitute. The children of his servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before him. He changeth not, therefore we are not consumed. His compassions fail not, they are new every morning; great is his faithfulness."

2. In the changes of the world we may see much of the wisdom and goodness of God.

The mutability of things, though it causes some pain, is on the whole, a source of enjoyment. We

are formed to love variety. If only one undiversified scene was continually presented to us, it would soon lose all its power to please, and life itself would become a burden.

The traveller, passing over a smooth and level plain, where, all along, a train of similar objects meets his eyes, soon finds the scene growing dull and tedious. He is impatient for a change. He longs for the rising hill, and the sinking vale; the ragged cliff, and the flowing stream; the wild forest, and the cultivated field. A varied motion rests his body, and a diversified landscape charms his imagination. Equally wearisome would be our journey through life, if nothing new occurred on the road.

Let a man choose his own condition. Let him be placed in the most agreeable circumstances, that he can imagine. Let him have as much wealth and honour, as many friends, and as pleasing companions, as he can wish. And now let his condition be fixed, and remain exactly the same, without any possible change—Will he enjoy it?—He cannot enjoy it for a single week. There must be something new, or every pleasure flattens and becomes insipid. Stretched on a bed of down, we soon grow restless, and turn from side to side.

As our pleasures are heightened, so our pains are mitigated, by variety. In the roughest roads that we travel, we meet with some smooth way, where we can walk with ease; and in the steepest ascents that we climb, there are places where we may sit down and rest.

Many are the troubles of the world; but they are intermixed with pleasures. And our troubles are not always the same; one passes away, as another comes. The burden does not continually press on the same part. We find some relief by shifting it from shoulder to shoulder. The christ-

ian finds more effectual support in the persuasion, that this troublous scene is but preparatory to a happier state, where all the changes will be only variety of good.

3. The transient fashion of the world, and the mutable condition of man, direct our thoughts to a future state of existence.

One change leads to another. There is a connexion in the chain of events. Each season is preparatory to the next. Summer and autumn provide for winter: Winter disposes the earth for the culture of summer. Youth is preparatory to manhood, and this to old age. We may naturally then conclude, that death is introductory to a new state of existence. All previous changes stand in connexion with something else; Shall we imagine that so great a change as death, is indifferent and unconnected? Our sight is bounded by the grave, but the chain is still extended. Pain, in this state, usually precedes high enjoyment; the humiliating circumstances of death are preludes to glory and immortality.

In spring we behold nature reviving from the dreary state of winter, and assuming new life and vigour. This change is emblematical of the general reviviscence of the human race. What is the spring, but a resurrection of nature from the grave? May not man as well be raised? May he not rise in a superior form, and to a nobler existence? The contemptible worm, which crawls on the ground, and lives on the weed, soon dies, and, incrusted in his own shell, lies senseless and inactive. But he is not confined here; he bursts the shell, starts forth a superior creature, wings the air, and sips the flowers of the field. May not man, who is now nourished from the dust, and is returning to the dust, come forth immortal and incorruptible, rise to a superior world, exist in a nobler manner, and

drink of pleasures untasted here? All things point to another world, and remind us, that for the holy and virtuous there is a state far better than this.

4. As the fashion of the world is passing away, it becomes us, under the most agreeable prospects, to rejoice as if we rejoiced not.

If, in our prosperity, we imagine, that we shall never be moved, we forget what we are, and in what a world we live. When our mountain seems to stand strong, let us remember, that it is God's hand which holds it steady, and his favour which gives us comfort. When he hides his face, we shall be troubled; when he withdraws his hand, our mountain will totter.

We should live above the world—above the creature; for the unstable world—the changing creature, cannot give us permanent happiness.

True christians are described, in the revelation, as clothed with the sun, crowned with stars, and having the moon under their feet. The moon, which is an attendant on this earth, and is subject to observable changes, is emblematical of the mutability of earthly things. The christian, whose head is among the stars, whose faith and affections are in heaven, despises the interests and glories of the world; for these, like the moon, are always changing.

5. If the fashion of the world is passing away, let us, in affliction, weep as if we wept not.

Things may change for the better, as well as for the worse. As adversity succeeds prosperity, so prosperity succeeds adversity. As darkness follows the day, so light chases away the darkness. Give thanks, O ye saints, at the remembrance of God's holy government; for his anger endures for a moment; but in his favour is life. Weeping may continue for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Severe afflictions seldom last long. The merciful

God will not contend forever, for the spirit would fail before him. Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his tender mercies.

6. The changing nature of things around us, should remind us of our great change. When we see the fashion of the world passing away, it becomes us to realise that we are passing away also, and have here no continuing city.

The seaman, in a feeble bark, tossed on the tumultuous ocean, driven by changing winds, rising and falling with the fluctuating waters, surely will not imagine himself on firm ground, nor forget his danger of being swallowed up in the deep.

We are on a rolling element. Every thing, which we behold, is shifting its appearance. Nothing is permanent. The scene is changing every hour. New objects present themselves, and new events take place. Time is on the wing. Each moment is a new portion of time, which never was ours before; and while we speak, it is gone. Every breath imbibes a new portion of air; and when we have expired it, we can collect it no more. Our fellow men are moving off the stage; they retire behind the curtain, and never are seen again. Like bubbles on the stream, they rise and float; they swell and burst: They rise no more; but others succeed in their place. Amidst these changes, Can we forget, that we are mutable and mortal? Let us live as on the borders of eternity, looking and preparing for that solemn moment, which will remove us from this changing scene, to a world where all things will be new.

Finally:—The transient nature of worldly things should lead our thoughts to heaven, where none of the painful vicissitudes of the present state will attend us.

Changes there will be in heaven; but not like some, which now we see. They will be only changes

for the better, from glory to glory, from perfection to perfection. There will be no fear of losing the crown, which we have gained, or of being banished from the blest abodes, into which we have entered. He who is holy, will be holy still. He will be made a pillar in the temple of God, and go no more out.

Let all be solicitous to become the subjects of that moral change, which qualifies for so glorious a state. While all things are changing, let us consider, that one change is needful—a change from sin to holiness; from the fashion of the world to the image of God. Let this be the object of our fervent desires. This will prepare us for the great change which awaits us; the change from this to another state.

When our souls are made partakers of a divine nature, and filled with divine love, all worldly changes will work for our good, and contribute to our growing preparation for the enjoyment of God.

Then shall we rejoice in the thought, that though the heavens and the earth are waxing old, and will be changed as a garment, yet God is the same forever, and his servants will be established before him.

SERMON XVI.

The infamous Character of the Churl.

1 SAMUEL, xxv. 2, 3.

There was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats; and he was sheering his sheep in Carmel. And the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife was Abigail. And she was a woman of a good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance; but the man was churlish and evil in his doings.—

THIS Nabal obtained a place in sacred history, not by any virtuous or worthy action, but merely by the churlishness of his temper, and the consequences which it produced. The severity of his manners in domestick life might probably have passed without this publick notice, had not the same severity appeared on a delicate and critical occasion.

David, with his adherents, driven into the wilderness by Saul's persecution, applied to this opulent farmer, in the time of family festivity, to send a small refreshment to him and his people. The

scurrilous return which he made to David's request, was such as would have touched the feelings of any man, especially such a man as David, naturally quick and sensible, and now irritated by an unprovoked persecution. David took a resolution, rash indeed, and unjustifiable, but, under his circumstances, in some measure excusable, to extirpate the churl and all that belonged to him.

Abigail his wife, having heard of his rudeness, and apprehending the mischief which was arising, interposed with such prudence and address, as to prevent the execution.

The story is familiar to you: I shall not need to relate it at large. We shall naturally advert to the most material circumstances in illustrating the character of Nabal.

This man was placed, by providence, in a condition to enjoy as much happiness as the world can give. David salutes him, as *the man who lived in prosperity.* He was distinguished from all around him by extensive possessions, success in business, the multitude of his flocks, the number of his servants, and the grandeur of his entertainments. In addition to all this, he was highly favoured in his domestick connexion. The woman, whom he had chosen for his companion in life, was beautiful in her person, superior in her accomplishments, sweet in her temper, soft in her manners, and engaging in her address. Such she appears through the whole story.

View the man only thus far, and you will pronounce him one of the happiest of mortals. In the sequel, however, you find him quite the reverse. He stands distinguished, as much for his infamous life and miserable death, as for his worldly greatness and prosperity. If you ask, What could make so prosperous a man unhappy? The his-

torian tells you, *The man was churlish and evil in his doings.*

The character of the *churl*, here ascribed to Nabal, is drawn at large, by the prophet Isaiah, chap. xxxii. 5—"The vile preson shall no more be called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful; for the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise hypocrisy, and utter error against the Lord, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. The instruments also of the churl are evil. He deviseth wicked devices to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaketh right: But the liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand."

1. The repulse, which Nabal gave to David's messengers, shews him to have been of a *contracted, illiberal* mind.

If the happiness of man consisted in the abundance of the things which he possesses, Nabal had been happy. But, quite the reverse, an abundance, without discretion to use it, capacity to enjoy it, and benevolence to apply it, tends only to misery. To a narrow and covetous soul, it is a source of jealousy, anxiety and fear.

Mankind are placed in a mutual connexion, with, and dependence on, one another, that there might be occasion and opportunity for the mutual exercise of kindness and beneficence. To do good and communicate, to relieve impotent distress, to cheer the desponding heart, to rescue the sons of virtue from the temptations of want, and spread peace and contentment among the poor and afflicted, is one of the highest pleasures of a generous mind. Riches in the hands of one who possesses such a soul, are a blessing to himself and to those around him. While they enable him to increase the hap-

piness of others, they make an addition to his own. He remembers the words of our Lord, recorded by Saint Luke, *It is more blessed to give, than to receive.* Job, in the day of his adversity, reflected with heartfelt satisfaction, that he had delivered the poor who cried, and the needy who had none to help them; that he had caused the widow's heart to sing for joy, and the blessing of those, who were ready to perish, had come upon him.

The churl, incapable of doing good, is more miserable in proportion to his abundance. His only enjoyment is mere animal gratification; and this is often accompanied with regret. He is vexed with perpetual suspicions of the envy and ill intentions of his neighbours. If he gives, it is with reluctance. His alms are extorted, rather than bestowed. He reflects upon them with pain. He upbraids those who have received them. He accuses himself with folly and imprudence, and resolves to guard in future against such waste and misapplication. The action which, in good men, would be a virtue, becomes a vice in him, by the evil passions which it awakens; and that which would gratify their benevolent feelings, is a torment to him, by crossing the intentions of his illiberal heart.

2. *Ingratitude* was conspicuous in the character of Nabal. *He rendered evil for good.*

David politely suggests the good offices which his people had done for Nabal, while his flocks were abroad in the fields. Nabal's shepherds confess the justice of the representation. "The men," say they, "were very good to us; we were not hurt, neither lacked we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them in the fields; but they were a wall to us by night and by day."

The smallest sense of obligation would have prompted a voluntary acknowledgment, to those who had yielded him such friendly protection; at a

time too, when their necessities were urgent, and they had power to have taken, with impunity, whatever their occasion required. But instead of this, to reject their decent application, and revile them as a gang of runaway servants, was a striking proof of a base and ungrateful heart.

The happiness of mankind much depends on reciprocal courtesies. It is often in our power to render essential services to our neighbours, without sensible inconvenience to ourselves. A liberal mind rejoices in such opportunities. Who of us, on recollection, will not find, that he has frequently received unsolicited benefits from those around him? We easily feel and remember an injury: But the kindnesses done us are more numerous than the injuries. Men seldom offer a direct, intentional wrong, unless they are pressed with great temptations, or, impelled by accidental passions; and these usually are transient. But there are a thousand little offices of goodness, which they voluntarily perform because they come naturally in their way, and fall in with the common feelings of humanity. It would tend much to cement friendship, unite neighbourhood, and preserve the peace of society, if instead of seriously noticing every trivial and casual wrong, we shall remark, acknowledge, and requite the good turns which are done us. The man who finds that his goodness is well accepted, feels himself repaid, and is encouraged to repeat it. But indifference and inattention in those whom he has studied to oblige, mortifies his feelings, and damps the ardor of his benevolence.

Besure, if a substantial kindness is done us, in the time of our calamity, to neglect the benefactor, in the day of our prosperity and his misfortune, is a degree of ingratitude not easy to be borne. Indifference, in such a case, wounds more deeply, than a positive injury in another: A positive injury, in

this case, will wound more deeply still. Nabal's ingratitude was provoking; the scurrility added to it was intolerable.

It was a noble spirit of gratitude, as well as piety, which the patriarch Joseph expressed, when being solicited by his master's wife to an act of lewdness, he replied, "Behold my master knoweth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand, neither hath he kept back any thing from me, but thee, because thou art his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" It is remarked much to the dishonour of one of Pharaoh's officers, to whom Joseph had shewed kindness, when they were fellow prisoners, "that in the days of his prosperity, he remembered not Joseph, but forgat him."

Gratitude feels a kindness, retains a sense of it, delights to acknowledge and requite it. The pleasure which it has felt in kindnesses received, prompts it to communicate like pleasure to others. The same habitual disposition which excites returns of favour to a benefactor, operates in a way of liberality to the indigent. He who experiences the satisfaction of receiving a seasonable benefit, without a heart to give to others, in similar want, the same satisfaction, is a stranger to the power of gratitude.

3. Nabal was a man of *brutal manners*, and *ungoverned passion*.

The answer which he returned to David's polite request, discovered the savage more than the man. "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants, now adays, that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and the flesh which I have killed for my sheerers, and give them to men, whom I know not whence they be?" Whatever allowance may be made for a harsh expression under a

sudden provocation, such cool, unprovoked scurrility, such railing in return for civility, indicates a heart thoroughly vitiated and depraved.

Religion requires, that our speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that we be gentle to all men, courteous, and easy to be entreated.

Many of the contentions, which happen between neighbours and friends, arise from the ungoverned petulence of the tongue. Men, subject to gusts of passion and rashness of speech, often create to themselves enemies, and disoblige and alienate their friends. But with a man, whose temper and language are generally lawless and ungoverned, no friendship can be formed; no society can be maintained. "Make no friendship," says Solomon, "with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go, lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul." It is not an easy matter to preserve our temper, while we converse with one who has no command of his own. The sparks of his fire, will easily kindle in us, for we all have combustible materials about us. If we have treated him with friendship, his ill nature is the more provoking. Solomon therefore advises, that we form no unnecessary connexion with men of lawless passions and insolent manners, lest we lose the command of our own tempers, and be hurried into a dangerous contention.

To call others by opprobrious names, exposes us to the judgment of God. Revilers are ranked among the odious characters, which are excluded from the kingdom of heaven. Christianity forbids us to render railing for railing; much more to begin the railing. On the contrary, it teaches us, that being reviled we should bless; being defamed, we should entreat. In the present weakness of human nature, such a command of ourselves will often be found difficult. Lest, therefore, we incautiously

fall into excess, the apostle directs, that if any man, who is called a brother, be a reviler, we keep no company with him.

4. This Nabal appears to have been peculiarly *fractious and troublesome, in his own family.*

His servants, too well acquainted with his temper and manners, characterize him, as such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him. His wife, when she saw danger arising against the family, ventured not to speak with him on the subject.

The happiness of domestick life consists most essentially in peace and harmony. The peace of a family depends on nothing so much as on the soft and easy manners, the courteous and obliging language, the smooth and placid tempers of the heads toward each other, and toward the inferior members. Government in a household is much better supported by goodness, than by rigour. There is a low, groveling familiarity, which renders a man contemptible. But to avoid this, he need not be a tyrant. Wanton severity is inconsistent with domestick authority. This may produce a fear and dread, which will operate occasionally: Goodness only will inspire with that calm reverence and steady affection, which are the true principles of obedience.

The man, who can never give an answer mildly, nor grant a request cheerfully—who can never pass over the smallest fault without menaces, nor reward a virtuous action with his smiles—who can never speak, but with stern and forbidding airs; nor reprove and advise, but with rough and boisterous passion—who never can enter into easy conversation with his companion, nor invite his children to the entertainment of instructive or amusing discourse—who can shew no tokens of approbation, when they have endeavoured to please him, nor restrain the storm of passion, if a cross accident hap-

pens, such a man, however he may be feared, cannot be reverenced. Though he may be dreaded, he cannot be loved. The external homage paid him, is attended with inward contempt. The obedience which he receives is extorted; not given. It is like the worship which certain heathens are said to pay to the devil; not in hope that he will do them good, but from fear that he will do them mischief.

This man can enjoy none of the pleasure of domestick friendship, the pleasure of mingling souls, exchanging sentiments, and communicating the feelings of the heart. His state is a kind of solitude; he has free intercourse with none; and they, who are compelled to be near him, think their state worse than solitude, because they are in perpetual fear. Abigail, in her important adventure to pacify David's exasperated spirits, conferred with her servants, rather than with her husband. From his advice she could expect no aid; and it was dangerous to speak to him.

5. A habit which added much to the infamy of his character, and probably aggravated the ruggedness of his temper and manners, was *intemperance.*

At the time, when his wife was interposing to divert the storm, which his rudeness had raised against his family, the brute himself was drunk. "He held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and his heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken." The manner in which he flew on David's messengers, gives reason to suspect, that his spirits had already been heated.

A temper naturally mild may be spoiled by excess. But when the natural passions are hasty and violent, intemperance seldom fails to urge them into a tempest. To govern the passions and rule the tongue is, in most men, a work of vigilance. But

men of quick and sudden tempers have need to be peculiarly on their guard. It is, of all men, the most dangerous for *them* to indulge the appetite. Indulgence inflames their spirits, and divests them of the power of self command. When they have given the passions supreme dominion, there is no extravagance from which they are secure, and no mischief to which they are not exposed. Nabal inflamed with wine, by a rash and passionate speech, involved himself and his family in a danger, which would have issued fatally, had not the prudence of his wife diverted it. "Who hath woe?" says Solomon, "Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babblings? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not on the wine, when it is red —at the last, it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine heart shall utter perverse things: Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth on the top of a mast."—Once more;

6. This Nabal was as infamous for his *pusillanimity* as for the violence of his passions and the rudeness of his manners.

When Abigail related to him David's high resentment and bloody resolution, and the manner in which she had prevented the approaching evil, "his heart died within him and became as a stone." Such a fatal shock did the story give him, that he survived it only ten days. Though he could rail on David at a distance, in haughty and blustering language, yet he had not fortitude to meet a danger when it was coming, nor even to bear the recital of it after it was past. His soul, enfeebled by passion and intemperance, immediately sunk under the thought of calamity. A firmness to meet danger

and bear adversity, is seldom found in those, who give indulgence to appetite and passion. "This takes away the heart."

If we would be prepared for the vicissitudes of an inconstant world, we must habituate ourselves to sobriety and selfgovernment. If we would enjoy the blessings of friendship, and the comforts of our worldly possessions, we must restrain our appetites, rectify our tempers and rule our tongues. The greatest affluence can never make a man happy, without a virtuous mind and prudent manners.

Nabal was blessed with a plentiful fortune, and an amiable companion. But what could these desirable circumstances avail the churlish wretch, who was void of the feelings of benevolence, and a stranger to the sentiments of gratitude—who knew not when to do a favour, nor how to acknowledge a courtesy—whose rough passions and rude language alienated his friends, and made strangers his enemies—whose wanton government excited the contempt of his servants—whose unsocial manners extinguished the affections of his wife—whose excessive indulgence obliterated the feeble traces of reason, which passion had left, and who, at last, died from a mere depression of spirit, at the thought of a danger, in which his own mad conduct had involved him?

Such a character, in the greatest affluence, appears contemptible in every eye.

Let us not be solicitous for worldly wealth; Our only solicitude should be to approve ourselves to God by rectitude of heart, and piety of life. Riches can make no man happy without virtue. The virtuous man may be happy without riches. Worldly wealth is a curse when it falls to the share of one, who knows neither how to use it, nor how to enjoy it.

'Had Nabal lived in poverty, instead of plenty, he might have acted more discreetly, and died less infamously. The natural haughtiness of his temper was probably increased by the idea of his worldly importance; and his affluent substance afforded him the means of destroying himself by intemperance.

Providence gives us some instances of men ruined and undone by their affluence, to teach us that it is neither to be envied in others, nor coveted for ourselves. We sometimes see those, who, having acted with propriety, and acquitted themselves with reputation, in the lower grades of life, grow haughty, insolent and vain, on a sudden elevation. Let us then have our conversation without covetousness, and be content with such things as we have.

That we may enjoy ourselves, let us rule our spirits. He who is a slave to his own passions, is subject to perpetual torment within, and exposed to a thousand vexations from without.

That we may enjoy the world, let us use it with sobriety; for all excess is as inconsistent with enjoyment, as it is with virtue. That we may prevent injuries, let us do none ourselves; for Who will harm us, if we are followers of that which is good? If we would have friends we must shew ourselves friendly. Friendship is a delicate flower; it may be blasted by the frequent winds of passion, or be nipped by the frost of indifference.

If we wish for respect from our children and domesticks let us rule them by the laws of kindness and love, forbearing menaces and not provoking them to anger, lest they be discouraged. A passionate government brings contempt; wanton severity excites rebellion.

If we would know the steady pleasures of domestick union, let us be pitiful and courteous, kind in our language, and obliging in our manners.

Smooth language prevents, and soft answers turn away wrath. Love is the happiness of domestick connexions. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.

SERMON XVII.

The different effects of a similar Education illustrated in Herod and Manaen.

ACTS, xiii. 1.

Now there were, in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch.

WE here see two men educated in the same family, and probably in much the same manner, and yet pursuing a very different course of life.—"Manaen was brought up with Herod the tetrarch."

It would be natural to expect, that children, who grew up together under similar examples and instructions, should appear in the same moral and religious character, when they came forward into publick life. But in the instance before us, the event was otherwise. We find one among the ministers, and the other among the persecutors of the church of Christ.

The whole family of the Herods are stigmatised in history for their lust and ambition, and especially

for their cruelty. Herod the great slew the infants in Bethlehem; his son imprisoned and murdered John the Baptist; and his grandson killed James the apostle.

Manaen is no where mentioned in the sacred history, but in this place. All that we read of him is, that he was brought up with Herod, as a brother, but was afterward among the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch, and was one of those who ministered to the Lord, and who, by the direction of the Holy Ghost, separated Barnabas and Paul to the work of preaching the gospel among the Gentiles. His name as well as the place of his early education, shews that he was a Jew by descent.

The church in Antioch was one of the most famous christian churches. It was here that the disciples of Christ first assumed the name of christians. From Manaen's being found ministering to the Lord among the prophets in this church, we may conclude, that he early professed his belief of the gospel. And the superior learning which he had acquired in his education with a young prince, together with his distinguished piety, zeal and fortitude, recommended him to the apostles as a man well qualified to take part with them in their ministry. He was certainly a man eminent for his faith and virtue, as well as for his learning and abilities; else he would not so soon have been admitted to a place among the prophets and teachers in this celebrated church.

The character of Herod was just the reverse of Manaen's. He was vicious and debauched in his private life, haughty, cruel and tyrannical in his government and a murderer of Christ's forerunner.

So diverse were the characters of these two men, who were brought up together under similar instructions and examples.

What kind of education they had in their youth, we may form some probable conjecture from Herod's high descent. He was of princely blood, and, doubtless, had a princely education: And as he was probably to be a chief ruler in Judea, we must suppose, that he was instructed in the Jewish religion: For this was justly esteemed a necessary branch of education in one, who was to preside over that people. Paul says to Herod Agrippa, "I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions, which are among the Jews;" and he appeals to him, as one, who, "believed the prophets." Thus Agrippa was educated; and probably his predecessors were educated in the same manner.

As Manaen was brought up with Herod, we may conclude, that he also, as well as Herod, was carefully instructed in the writings of Moses and the prophets, and in the rites and forms of the Jewish religion, with those other branches of learning, which are judged necessary to qualify men for high and important stations.

But amidst these superior advantages, there were undoubtedly many dangerous temptations. The pomp and pleasure of princely courts, and the corrupt examples that are often seen there, are by no means favourable to youthful piety. Herod made no virtuous improvement of the advantages which attended his early life. On the contrary, he was led away by the corrupt manners of an impious court. Manaen, in the same situation, early became religious, escaped the corruptions of the world, and made such advancement in knowledge and piety, that we find him ranked among some of the first preachers of the gospel.

We here see, that youths, brought up in the same family, and in the same manner, may take to very different courses, and make a very different end.

Men's lives are not always answerable to the advantages which they enjoy. "Many are called but few are chosen." That same gospel, which is a savour of life unto life to some, is to others a savour of death unto death. The preaching of the cross of Christ, which was to some a rock of salvation, was to others a stone of stumbling. These observations of scripture we see verified in fact. Among the multitudes, which enjoy the same gospel; yea, and who profess to believe it too, there are different characters. While some, by a patient continuance in welldoing, seek for glory, there are others who obey not the truth, but hold it in unrighteousness.

Nor is this diversity of character to be seen only in larger societies; it may be found in particular families.

Education doubtless has great influence in forming the temper and manners. It is reasonable to expect, that men will ordinarily be virtuous or vicious, according to the turn which is given to their minds in the discipline of youth. If you train up a child in the way in which he should go, you may hope, that, when he is old, he will not depart from it; but if you leave him to himself, to the impulse of his own giddy inclinations, and to the corrupt influence of vicious examples; and beside, if to them you add your own corrupt example and counsel, you may reasonably expect, he will bring his friends to shame, and himself to ruin.

There are, however, exceptions from this observation. There are some who under great disadvantages early enter upon a virtuous course, and steadily pursue it through life; and there are those, who, in contempt of the best instructions and examples, make themselves vile and will not be restrained. In the family of David, who resolved to walk within his house in a perfect way, there was

rebellious Absalom. In the house of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin, there was godly Abijah.

In some families we see the children generally of a sober and virtuous turn; and in other families we see them the reverse. When the children are generally vicious, we suspect there is some gross neglect in those who have had the care of them; or if they are of a contrary character, we conclude much pains have been taken in their religious education. And though, for the most part, this conclusion will be found just, yet it is not always so. For we see this difference of character take place among children of the same family, who have had the same instructions and examples.

It will naturally be enquired, Whence proceeds this difference?

1. There is undoubtedly a very great diversity in natural temper.

Though all are partakers of the corruption consequent on the primitive apostasy, yet this corruption does not always appear and operate in just the same way. Though in all there is an inclination to evil, yet the inclination is not in all to the same evil, or in the same degree. This diversity calls for different treatment. The same kind of government which would be useful to one, may be dangerous to another. Those restraints, which would be sufficient for this youth, may be unfelt and disregarded by that; and the curb, which would only hold the latter, might break and destroy the tender spirit of the former.

It is the wisdom of parents to watch and observe the various passions, tempers and propensities of their children, and diversify their government accordingly.—And then,

2. Children early have different worldly prospects, which often make a great difference in their character and conduct.

This was remarkably the case of the two young men mentioned in our text. Though Herod and Manaen were educated together, yet they had not the same prospect in life. Herod, who was of royal descent, had early expectations of being exalted to a throne. This grand object probably engrossed his thoughts; and to this all his ambition, and all his studies were directed. The other had no such object before him. He was born to a humbler lot. His mind was more at liberty to admit the sober concerns of religion. Worldly greatness is not usually the most favourable to piety. The apostle says, "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." He who would receive the kingdom of God, must humble himself as a little child. Such a difference of prospects, as there was between these two persons, cannot ordinarily take place. But there may be a difference in a less degree, among brethren in every family.

Different passions and capacities put young men on different pursuits. Some, through a natural indolence or self diffidence, fall so low in their views and designs, that they never reach to eminence in any profession; nor attain to that degree of usefulness and respectability, of which they seem naturally capable. Others take their aim so high that they never can rise to the object by any virtuous exertions. Hence by their aspiring ambition they are urged to an indirect and winding path, that they may climb the steep ascent, where the cautious foot of virtue will not dare to tread. "They who will be rich," says the apostle, "fall into temptation, and a snare, and many foolish lusts which drown men in final perdition." Happy is the youth, who sets out in life, with a governing aim to approve himself to God, and secure the joys of immortality; and to this aim subordinates all his temporal views.

3. The sovereign grace of God must also be acknowledged in the difference which we often observe among the members of the same family.

The dependence of mankind in their fallen state, on the influence of the divine Spirit, must be acknowledged by all who believe revelation. God affords this kindly influence to all under the gospel, especially in the early period of life. There is a day, when the Spirit of grace strives with them, and the things of their peace may be known. Happy are they, who early attend to these things, and who obey the heavenly voice while it is called to day. As this grace is undeserved, so it may be afforded to different persons in various degrees, and for a different length of time. No man can demand it as his native right, and therefore none can complain, though it is afforded to others in a greater measure than to himself. Besides, Where is the youth who can say, He has never grieved the spirit of grace—never resisted its holy motions—never received its influence in vain. If among those, who have alike forfeited the grace of God, it is withdrawn from some, and renewed to others, Where is the injustice? Shall the eye of man be evil, because God is good? May not God have mercy on whom he will have mercy, when he owes his mercy to none?

Farther—Though men may be born and educated under the same external advantages, yet doubtless some do more than others to oppose the grace, and quench the spirit of God. And perhaps many, who appear to us to possess the happiest natural temper, and to conduct among mankind with the most agreeable manners, may have indulged those impious thoughts and passions toward God, which others never dared to retain; and, by their secret wickedness, have done more to provoke God, and grieve his holy spirit, than some who appear far more criminal in the undiscerning eye of man. Though

the grace of God is sovereign, it is not arbitrary. It makes a difference among men in the bestowment of outward advantages and inward assistances; but divine wisdom always sees a reason for this difference, though human ignorance discerns none.

This subject will afford several useful reflections.

1. We see the particular care, which was taken in the apostolick times, that publick teachers should be men of distinguished learning and ability, as well as exemplary virtue and piety.

Most of Christ's first disciples were, indeed, men who had received, in their youth, but a common education. But before they were sent forth to preach, they were taken under the immediate discipline and instruction of Jesus himself; and were, for several years, trained up for the ministry under his care. Paul enjoyed not this privilege; but he had other literary advantages; he was a man of the first education in his day, being brought up at the feet of Gamaliel.

When the disciples, after their master's ascension, sent forth teachers into the churches which they had planted, they ever gave a preference to men of learning. Manaen was one who had been favoured with a princely education. Timothy from a child had known the holy scriptures. Apollos was a man mighty in the scriptures. Luke, Stephen, and others, appear to have been men of superiour literary accomplishments. And, as the apostles always considered learning to be a desirable qualification in those whom they recommended to the ministry, so they also cautioned the ministers whom they ordained, not to lay hands suddenly on any man, and particularly on novices, who had not had time to furnish their minds with competent knowledge to become teachers of others.

2. We see that parents ought to pay a particular attention to the different tempers and dispositions of their children, and diversify their government accordingly.

As there is a variety in the natural and constitutional bias of the human mind, so the same manner of government, which would be proper for one, might be very unsuitable for another. Some must be ruled with greater rigor, others with more lenity—Some kept under a severer curb, others treated with more tenderness and indulgence. The parent ought to wateh the early inclinations of his children, that he may correct their evil propensities, before they are grown into incurable habits; and may encourage and confirm every hopeful disposition, lest it be overborne by the power of temptation. Family government is a work which requires much care and prudence, that it may be adapted to the tempers and circumstances, infirmities and dangers of those who are the subjects of it; and diversified according to their respective cases.

3. The young may here see, that no worldly connexions, no outward temptations, no incitements or examples, will excuse them in the neglect of religion.

Herod the tetrarch was a man of a vicious and abandoned character. Though he did some commendable actions, he is not applauded for any habitual virtue; nor was there scarcely a vice of which he was not capable. Manaen, conversant in a royal court, and connected with so vile a companion, received an education, which, however favourable to learning, was exceedingly dangerous to his virtue. And yet we find him so distinguished for his piety, that he is early numbered among the prophets and teachers of the church.

There is such a thing as a youth's maintaining his virtue, amidst the most powerful temptations.

There is such a thing, as being blameless and harmless, and without rebuke, in the midst of the vicious and profane. There is such a thing, as discharging the duties of relation and friendship to bad men, without an imitation of their wicked manners. You are not to seek connexions with the ungodly; you are not to choose them for your stated companions. There is always danger in associating with the vicious: And you are not unnecessarily to throw yourselves into the jaws of danger. It was David's wisdom, that, when he resolved to keep God's commandments, he said to evildoers, Depart from me. But if providence so orders your situation in life, that you are unavoidably conversant with the wicked, you must guard against the infection of their corrupt advice and example. If you must have fellowship with them in your civil concerns, yet have no fellowship with their unfruitful works, but rather reprove them. The man who voluntarily runs into the company of the profane, will easily be seduced by them; for he goes with a heart disposed to conform to their manners; and, by inviting temptations, he forfeits the divine protection. But if providence calls you into the place of temptation, and you take heed to your ways, while the wicked are before you, the grace of God will be ready to your assistance.

Let this resolution be fixed in your minds, that you will walk in the path of virtue; and when you meet with temptations to depart from it, listen not to them; repel them in their first approach; renew your good resolution; think of the danger of violating it; and apply to God for his preserving grace. Thus you may keep yourselves unspotted from the world, and the wicked one will not touch you.

4. The young are here cautioned, that they abuse not the grace of God.

You see, that persons in the same family, and under the same advantages, pursue different courses, and come to different ends. If external means alone were sufficient to religion, why was Herod so different from Manaen? The grace of God was undoubtedly to be acknowledged in the preservation of the latter from the guilty course of the former. But what if Manaen had continually opposed every serious sentiment, conviction and resolution excited in his mind? What if he had studied to extinguish a sense of virtue, by encouraging the principles of infidelity? What if he had constantly sought to banish all rational thoughts and religious purposes, by dissipation and sensuality? Is it probable that we should have found him among the professors and the teachers of religion? Some, indeed, are recovered, late in life, from gross wickedness. But more usually, they who give themselves up to impiety and irreligion in youth, become so hardened in their sins, and so dead to a sense of their danger, that nothing awakens them to repentance.

If you depend on the grace of God, it is of importance that you early attend to its kind motions on your hearts; that you encourage the convictions which it awakens on your consciences; and that you pursue the virtuous resolutions which it excites. Never dare to act contrary to the real sense and feeling of your minds—never dare to entertain any corrupt and licentious principles—never dare to make light of things serious, and to treat with contempt the sacred institutions of religion. Carefully avoid whatever tends to stupify the conscience, and to deaden the sensibility of the heart. For if you thus oppose and abuse that grace of God, on which you depend, you have reason to fear, that you will soon be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and will finally perish in your guilt and impenitence.

5. Let the young be rational and discreet in forming their worldly prospects.

Herod's royal birth gave scope to his ambition; and the expectation of worldly greatness contributed to draw him off from religion, and to plunge him into those vices which terminated in his ruin. If the honours and the riches of the world are so dangerous, let none raise high prospects to themselves. Set out in life with an aim to do good—to serve God in works of piety, and to serve your generation in the practice of justice and charity. Think of no worldly honour and wealth, but what shall rise on the foundation of virtue and righteousness. You may aim at a degree of respectability among men. This is an honest and manly aim. But never aim at any kind of worldly greatness, but what may be attained in a way of well doing. Virtue is dignity in itself. All kinds of worldly dignity, but that which is built on a virtuous character, are but marks of infamy.

Remember, you have a part to act in this world, which bears a relation to the future. Seek first the kingdom of God. Seek nothing that is contrary to this. Governed by a superior regard to futurity, you may pursue your worldly interests with innocence. While religious principles predominate in your heart, you may proceed safely. Your secular employments will be subservient to the interest of your souls; and your religion will also contribute to your temporal happiness.

When you see the young, who enjoy the means of religion, and the advantages of a good education, running headlong into the path of vice and ruin, look upon them with compassion and fear. Pity them, and tremble for yourselves.

Let a view of their danger awaken your caution to avoid the same. Warn them of the misery before them. At least, show them, by your exam-

ple, that you view their track as fatal. Fly from it, and walk in the way everlasting. "Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful; but who delights in the law of his God, and meditates therein continually."

6. How unhappy will be the case of those youths, who have not only enjoyed a good education, but been favoured with pious examples among the youths of their connexion, and yet, after all, have pursued the path of vice. This was the case of Herod. Manaen was much to be commended, that he had followed religion in opposition to the vicious example of Herod, with whom he had been brought up. Herod is worthy of a sorer condemnation, because he turned away from religion, when he had so inviting an example before him in the amiable life and manners of Manaen his foster brother. The virtue of the one is exalted; the guilt of the other is aggravated, by the contrast.

Know, my young friend, if sinners entice you, you are not to consent. You cannot excuse yourself in a vicious course, though you have ever so many enticements. How inexcusable are you then, if you run into this course, in opposition to the virtuous and pious examples of your friends and companions. You may not follow a multitude to do evil; much less may you forsake the virtuous to do evil alone. The true penitent will no longer run, with former guilty companions, into excess of riot. And will you dare to run into excess of riot, when you see others flying from the fatal track?

You are brought up in a religious family. You have, in common with others, received seasonable instructions and warnings. Do you see some with whom you are educated, walking in wisdom's way, devoting themselves to God, and working out their

salvation? And are you careless and sensual, profane and ungodly; regardless of God's word, and of your own salvation? What excuse will be found for you? Those virtuous youths have been brought up with you; And why have you perverted an education, which has been so salutary to them? You and they have dwelt together here, and enjoyed similar advantages, you value their company and friendship, you esteem them for their virtuous manners; But will you pursue a course so diverse from theirs? Must there soon be an eternal separation between you and them? While they are rising to the world of glory, Will you rush headlong down to the regions of darkness?

Let their example rebuke your impiety; awaken you from your carelessness; and engage you to mind, in this your day, the things which belong to your peace.

Be a follower of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Be the companion of them who fear God and keep his commandments. Let their friends, be your friends; their God, your God; and whither they go, do you go also.

SERMON XVIII.

The Dovelike Descent of the Spirit on Christ.

LUKE iii, 22.

The Holy Ghost descended, in a bodily shape, like a dove upon him.——

THIS visible descent of the Holy Ghost on our divine Lord, was at the time of his baptism, when he was entering on his publick ministry. The priests under the law were inaugurated into office by the ceremony of anointing with oil, and washing with water. Jesus, that he might conform to every divine institution, chose to begin the execution of his sacred office, by the like solemn consecration. He therefore came to John to be baptised of him. Immediately after his baptism, while he was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended on him, and there issued from the sky a voice proclaiming him God's beloved son, and commanding the people to hear him.

This was a manifest fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek." That his baptism was his unction to the

ministry, Peter expressly teaches, in the tenth chapter of the acts.—"The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ, that word ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism, which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power."

Jesus, being the divine mediator, and himself without sin, could not need baptism for the purposes, for which it is applied to us. The baptism which he received must, in its design, be a very different thing from that, which he afterward instituted, as a token of the remission of sin, and eternal life in a way of faith and repentance. Hence it appears, that all arguments drawn from his baptism, to determine the time, or manner in which others should be baptised, are wholly impertinent.

After Christ's baptism, "heaven was opened, and the holy Ghost descended in a visible form." The appearance probably was a *bright cloud*, which, under the old testament, was the ordinary symbol of God's presence. When the voice, here mentioned, was uttered again at the transfiguration on the mount, it proceeded from a *bright cloud*, which overshadowed him and his attending disciples. This cloud is called by Saint Peter, *the excellent glory*. When the holy Ghost fell on the disciples at the time of pentecost, there was the appearance of *fire*. Christ is said to baptise with *the holy Ghost and with fire*. In allusion to these representations, men's opposition to the Spirit of grace, is called *quenching* the Spirit. The evangelist says, "The holy Ghost descended, *in a bodily shape as a dove*." It is not necessary to suppose, that here was the *shape* or *figure* of a dove; nor indeed will the syntax of the greek words well admit this sense. The resemblance was rather in the *manner of descent*. The

bright cloud, the excellent glory, descended, as a dove descends, gently hovering around, and settling upon the head of Jesus.

By this symbol, and the voice attending it, he was manifestly declared to be *the Son of God.* Accordingly John says, "I have seen the Spirit descending from heaven as a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not; *i. e.* until this time, I had not so full and certain a knowledge of him: "But he that sent me to baptise with water, the same had said to me, upon whom thou shalt see the spirit descending and remaining, the same is he who baptiseth with the holy Ghost. And I saw and bare record, that this is the Son of God."

The descent of the Spirit on Christ *as a dove*, is a circumstance taken notice of by all the evangelists; and it deserves our particular attention.

This might be intended to point out Jesus, as the messenger of peace, to a guilty world.

Noah, in the time of the deluge, sent forth a dove out of the ark, to discover whether the waters were abated. In the evening she returned to him, with an olive leaf in her mouth. By this he knew, that the face of the earth began to be uncovered. This was to the patriarch welcome intelligence. More glorious news does Christ bring to our guilty race.

When Jesus preached in the synagogue of Nazareth, he applied to himself the words of the prophet—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to publish deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." He said to his hearers, "This scripture is today fulfilled in your ears."—"And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth."

The dovelike descent of the Spirit on Jesus, indicated him to the assembled multitude, as a pattern of meekness, innocence and love, of which virtues the dove is an emblem. And his subsequent manners corresponded with the emblem. He was harmless and inoffensive in all his behaviour. Under injuries he was mild and gentle. In his publick office he was tender and affectionate. He laboured to convince and reclaim sinners by the soft and winning arguments of goodness and compassion, rather than to terrify and amaze them by the awful displays of wrath and power. Thus was fulfilled in him the prediction of the prophet—"Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my beloved, in whom my soul deligtheth. I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive nor cry, nor shall any man hear his voice in the street; a bruised reed shall he not break, nor quench the smoaking flax, until he bring forth judgment unto victory."

This descent of the Spirit in the manner of a dove, may also be designed to signify to us the true genius of Christ's gospel, and the distinguishing character of his disciples.

Hence then we may observe, that *the religion of Jesus consists in a dovelike temper.* This observation we will endeavour to illustrate.

That we may proceed with safety we will give no indulgence to imagination, but will strictly follow the allusions which we find in scripture.

1. The dove is an emblem of *purity.*

In the law of Moses this was reckoned a clean bird; and it was selected for an offering in the ceremony of purification. The dovelike descent of the Spirit on Christ reminds us, that, by his gospel we are called, not to uncleanness, but to sanctification. His *precepts* require the strictest purity of thought and intention. His *doctrines* in their prop-

er influence, raise our views above earthly interests, and direct them to things which are in heaven. His *example* teaches us to be holy, undefiled and separate from sinners. His Spirit, in its operations and fruits, corresponds with his examples, doctrines and precepts. If then we profess to be christians, we acknowledge our obligation to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and piously in the world, looking unto Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from iniquity, and purify us to himself, a people zealous of good works.

2. Christ directs his disciples to be *harmless* as doves.

Of this dovelike temper he was himself an amiable pattern. The same meek and inoffensive spirit which was in him, must also be in us. We are to give no offence, but to please all men in all things, seeking the profit of many, that they may be saved. We are to condescend to men of low estate; to bear the infirmities of the weak; in matters of indifference to comply with the opinions of our brethren, and in matters of doubt to receive them without uncharitable disputation, always allowing them the liberty which we claim for ourselves, to follow the dictates of conscience. We are to be pitiful in our feelings, courteous in our language and gentle in our manners. We are to be peaceable when differences happen to arise, candid in our construction of men's doubtful actions, and ready to forgive when we meet with injuries. We are to be quiet and do our own business, to be tender of the reputation of our neighbours, to speak evil of no man, to render unto all the honour and respect which belong to them, and treat them according to their condition and character in life. In a word, we are to follow Christ's steps, who was holy and harmless,

who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.

3. The dove, in the book of Canticles, is an emblem of *cheerfulness* and *joy*.

"Lo, the winter is past and gone, the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come; the voice of the *turtle* is heard in our land."

The dovelike temper of the gospel is sweet, serene and pleasant. Joy is one of the fruits of the spirit: It is one of the characters of Christ's religion: It is the temper with which we acceptably serve him. "The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; and he that in these things serveth Christ, is accepted of God, and approved of men." True christians have joy and peace in believing, and abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.

With joy they contemplate the glorious discoveries of the gospel; the wonderful mercy of God to a guilty world; the astonishing interposition of a divine Saviour for the redemption of our perishing race; and the free and gracious offers of salvation to the chief of sinners.

The precepts of Christ's religion they approve and choose, as divinely excellent, suited to guide their actions, refine their tempers, and prepare their hearts for heavenly pleasures.

They rejoice in that holy and benevolent government, which God exercises in the world; and in the liberty, which he indulges them, to repair to his throne for the supply of all their wants, and for protection in all their dangers.

When they can appropriate the rich promises of God, and ascertain their interest in them, their religious joy, feeling its present security, and anticipating its approaching felicity, will sometimes swell past utterance, and rise beyond the reach of de-

scription. "The trial of your faith," says Saint Peter, "will be found to glory and honour at the appearing of Christ; whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

The religion of Christ, where it has its genuine influence, produces a holy, humble joy in God. It does not make men sour, morose and peevish; but contented, serene and thankful. It disposes them, not to censure, but to justify the ways of God—not to complain of, but to acquiesce in the plan of his government. It does not depress their spirits, and spread a gloom over their faces; but inspires their souls with cheerful and pleasing hopes, which a stranger intermeddles not with. It teaches them to contemplate the wisdom, justice and goodness of God in all his dispensations, and thus gives a relish to prosperity, and consolation in adversity. It extends the prospects beyond this mortal state, and opens to the view more glorious scenes of delight above the skies, from whence faith and hope look down, with indifference, on the transient and unsatisfying objects of the world. It ministers to the mind matter of meditation and employment, sweetly adapted to its renewed and spiritual taste; and thus secures it from that restless anxiety, which vexes and torments earthly souls.

It is not, then, the sour and complaining, the gloomy and fretful, but it is the cheerful and contented, the serene and thankful christian, who discovers the genuine spirit, the dovelike temper of Christ's religion.

4. Doves are distinguished by their mutual *fidelity* and *love*.

To this social and affectionate property there are frequent allusions in scripture. The bridegroom,

in the book of Canticles, calls the bride by this, among other endearing names, "*O, my dove*, let me see thy face, and hear thy voice, for thy voice is sweet, and thy face is comely." People in affliction are described as "mourning like *doves*," who have lost their companions.

Mutual love is the temper of the gospel. This is Christ's command to his disciples, "Love one another, as I have loved you." "By this," says he, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." Christians are required "to love one another with a pure heart fervently, and above all things to have fervent charity among themselves."

Under the influence of this fervent charity, they will esteem and regard one another for that similarity of temper and manners, which is common to them all, and which they have all learnt from the same gospel. They will take pleasure in each other's company, and delight to associate for the joint worship of their common Lord. They will maintain a strict fidelity. Having covenanted together for mutual edification and comfort, they will walk in the same steps, and by the same rule. They will not rove and scatter abroad; but, like the flock of Christ, they will come together in one place, and keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. They will walk in all lowliness and meekness, bearing offences, forgiving injuries, and returning again to peace if fellowship happens to be interrupted. They will take a sensible share in each others pleasures and affections. If one suffers, they will suffer with him; if one is honoured, all will rejoice. If one wanders away, or seems to be lost, all will mourn his unhappy case, and pray for his recovery. They will bewail such as have sinned and have not repented; and him who re-

pents they will restore in the spirit of meekness, considering themselves, lest they also be tempted.

5. The dove is a *defenceless* bird. Hence she is described as "dwelling in the clefts of the rocks, and in the secret places of the stairs"; and as "flying to her windows" in times of danger.

In this view she is an emblem of christian *faith* and *humility*.

True believers, sensible of their weakness, and of the dangers which attend them, trust not in themselves, but in the power and grace of their Saviour. They dare not wander from him, and commit themselves to the world at large, for they know that birds of prey, the powers of the air, are seeking whom they may destroy. They keep near to their Divine Protector, dwell in his house, and live on the food which is there provided. They venture not to depart from the sight, or the reach of his windows. When temptations pursue them, hither they fly for security. To the selfrighteous hypocrite, his own goodness and strength is a strong city, a high wall in his own conceit. But to humble believers, the name of their Redeemer is a strong tower; into this they run, and are safe.

6. The excellent glory, which descended like a dove, and rested on Jesus, might be intended to represent the *beauties* of his church, adorned and dignified by the graces of his spirit.

The church of Christ is compared to a fair princess, all glorious within, and clothed in garments of wrought gold. The dove, which is a beautiful bird, is a natural emblem of the virtuous and good works, which distinguish the christian character. By this allusion, the Psalmist describes the glorious change made in the people of God, when they were delivered from the bondage and superstitions of Egypt, and admitted to enjoy the peculiar privileges of the sanctuary. "Though ye have lien a-

mong the pots, yet ye shall be as the wings of a *dove* covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."

The reformation of the church, after a time of great declension, is expressed by her "rising from the dust, putting on her beautiful garments, and shining forth in the glory of her Lord." The professors of godliness are exhorted to adorn themselves, not with gold, and pearls, and costly array, but with good works, and the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit; for these are of great price in the sight of God. The righteousness of the saints is compared to white raiment. They who watch and keep their garments, will walk with Christ in white, for they are worthy.

But lest I pursue the allusions too far, I will only observe, once more,

7. The dove, which is a fruitful bird, is, by Isaiah, made an emblem of the *increase* of the church in her happy and prosperous periods. Then converts shall fly unto God's altar, "as *doves* to their *windows*."

He says, "The Redeemer shall come to Zion—his Spirit shall be upon her, and his words shall not depart out of her mouth, nor out of the mouth of her seed—and the glory of the Lord shall be upon her. The Gentiles shall come to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising. Lift up thine eyes, and see; all they gather themselves together; they come unto thee. Thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. The abundance of the sea shall be converted to thee, and the forces of the Gentiles shall come to thee."

Having mentioned, by name, several countries, from whence converts shall come to glorify God in his house, the prophet is surprised with still new *accessions* from unknown, or unexpected parts of

the world. "Who are these, that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows?" A flight of birds resembles a cloud. The multitudes pressing from all parts into the kingdom of Christ, the prophet compares to a cloud of doves flying into the windows of the dovehouses. "Who are these that fly!" It is an expression of admiration and surprise at such a speedy increase of the church, from persons, or countries, in which such a change had been little expected. A similar expression we find in the revelation. After an hundred and forty and four thousand had been sealed out of all the tribes of Israel, John says, "He beheld; and lo, a great multitude which no man could number, from all nations and people, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and cried, Salvation to our God and to the Lamb." And one of the elders said, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and, Whence come they?" On enquiry, it was found, that "these had come out of great tribulation." They had come into the church through great trials and dangers. Such a mighty accession was matter of admiration and joy among angels, as well as men. If there is joy in heaven, when one sinner repents, how great will be the joy, when nations are born at once, and the earth brings forth in a day?

The social and benevolent spirit of religion in christians, operates in fervent desires and prayers for the increase of Christ's flock. They look and long for the time, the set time, to favour Zion. They mourn the decay of religion among professors, and the general indifference to it among mankind. They speak often one to another, that they may be fellowhelpers, to the truth. They comfort and encourage those who would join themselves to the Lord; they take up the stumbling blocks out of the way of the lame and feeble. They animate the

young and tender, the diffident and fearful. They are careful not to perplex weak and honest minds with difficulties and objections, and thus to make the hearts of the righteous sad, whom God hath not made sad; but rather to remove dangereous impediments, and confirm good resolutions. This is the divine instruction; "Cast ye up; go through the gates; prepare the way; gather out the stones; say to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh." Though the glorious things foretold concerning the church, remain to be accomplished in some future time; yet, if christians would unite in their prayers and labours for her increase, some part of the promised glory might be anticipated in our own times.

SERMON XIX.

The Dovelike Descent of the Spirit on Christ.

LUCE iii. 22.

The holy Ghost descended, in a bodily shape, like a dove upon him.—

FROM this comparison of the descent of the spirit on Christ, to the gentle hovering of a dove when it alights, we have observed, that *the Spirit of Christ's religion is a dovelike Spirit.*

This observation we have illustrated in several particular instances, taken from the allusions of sacred scripture.

The illustration of our subject opens to our view some important matters, which I shall now lay before you, as its proper *improvement.*

1. Our subject suggests to us, that the spirit of Christ usually comes to the soul in a *mild* and *gentle* manner. His operations are, as his fruits, dovelike, sweet and kind.

The benevolent and friendly nature of the dispensation which Christ was about to introduce, was intimated in the manner of the Spirit's descent.

The law, which was a ministration of death and condemnation, was delivered to the people with circumstances of terror and amazement. God came down on the mount with thunder and lightning, with an earthquake and tempest; and uttered the law with such an awful voice, that they who heard it, intreated, that it might not be spoken any more.

Christ came in a different manner to publish his gospel. He appeared, not in the terrors of unveiled divinity, but in the fashion of a man—not in the forbidding majesty of a monarch, but in the more familiar form of an ordinary person. He taught with such a soft and easy address, that they who heard him, wondered at the gracious words, which proceeded out of his mouth, and confessed, that never man spake like him. He dwelt among men full of grace, as well as of truth. If his reproofs were sometimes pointed with severity, it was only when they met with callous and obdurate hearts.

As his *manner* of teaching, so the *doctrines* which he taught, were kind and gracious. While he with plainness condemned the sinner, and warned him of the awful consequence of his impenitence, he proclaimed aloud the mercy of God to pardon the penitent, and, with melting eyes, lamented the dreadful fate of the obstinate and irreclaimable.

The ordinary influence of his Spirit, in the conversion of sinners, corresponds with the genius of his gospel, and the manner of his instruction.

The miraculous gifts of the Spirit, on the day of pentecost, were dispensed in a more grand and solemn manner. "When the disciples were gathered together, suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the house, where they were: And there appeared cloven

tongues, like as of fire, and sat on each of them; and they were filled with the holy Ghost, and spake with other tongues." But the ordinary operation of the Spirit in the renovation of sinners, and the sanctification of believers, is soft and mild, not like a flame of fire, but like a genial warmth—not like a rushing wind, but like a gentle breeze. The apostle says, "God has not given us the spirit of bondage, but the spirit of adoption—not the spirit of fear, but the spirit of love and of a sound mind.

The awakening and convincing power of the Spirit in sinners is, doubtless, often attended with a degree of terror, greater or less according to the degree of guilt and enmity previously contracted. But this terror, so far as it is the effect of gospel truth, and divine influence, is accompanied with hope, not with despair. Sinners under conviction may, indeed, be so filled with a sense of guilt and danger, as, in a great measure, to overlook the encouragements of the gospel, and consequently to fall into great despondency. But their desponding apprehensions proceed from the weakness of nature, or the power of temptations; not from the direct influence of the spirit of God.

The gospel, while it represents the awful danger of the careless and impenitent, proposes to the awakened and enquiring every possible encouragement. And the influence of the Spirit is so agreeable to the gospel, and so consentaneous to reason, that a man never feels the power of divine truth so sensibly, nor exercises his understanding so clearly, as when he is under this heavenly direction.

A person, under true conviction of sin, will be deeply humbled, will see vast unworthiness; will feel his desert of condemnation; will admire God's patience toward so guilty a creature. But horrible, despairing apprehensions are no part of real conviction. The divine Spirit comes to the soul, not

like a vulture to terrify and devour, but like a dove to invite and allure.

The Psalmist confesses, that he had felt anxious doubts of God's mercy; but he ascribes them to "his own infirmity," not to the divine Spirit.

If we were to suppose a person enlightened to a view of his own sinfulness, and, at the same time, a stranger to the hopes of the gospel, we might expect to find him in a state of horror and dismay. But they who understand the way of salvation through a redeemer, will feel hope kindly interposing to relieve the terrors of guilt; except where hope is secluded by partial views, mistaken opinions, injudicious counsel, a gloomy temper, or powerful temptations. The gospel holds up terrors to the impenitent and obstinate; but the inquiring and returning see a hope set before them.

You fear, perhaps, that you have never experienced the transforming power of divine grace, because you cannot remember to have felt those amazing terrors, of which you have heard some godly people speak. But you must consider, that the gospel makes no certain degree of terror, the rule by which to judge of the sincerity of your repentance. This may be various in different subjects, according to their characters and circumstances. The habitual disposition of your hearts, with respect to sin and holiness, is a far more certain indication of your character. If you have had those convictions of sin, which have issued in a hatred of it, and in a choice of holiness, you have had all that are necessary. And whatever pangs and terrors you have known, if they have left you in the love, and under the power of sin, your last state is worse than the first. You are to judge of your state, rather by your habitual temper than by any temporary exercises. A calm, sedate view of the evil of sin, accompanied with a just apprehension of the grace and mercy of the gospel, is far more likely to pro-

duce a durable good effect, than any violent overbearing terrors. Judas had horror without repentance. Felix was suddenly struck with the fear of a future judgment, but still continued in his sins. The height of religious terrors will not ensure repentance, nor afford an evidence of it. More calm convictions often issue well. The Eunuch became a believer by a rational attention to the gospel; and he went his way rejoicing. Lydia, in hearing the word, felt her heart opened to attend to the truth; and she was judged faithful to the Lord.

I would not be understood to insinuate, that violent convictions never precede true repentance. Paul and the jailer trembled and were astonished. But what I intend is, that there may be such convictions without repentance; and that there may be, and often is, repentance produced in a more easy and gentle manner: So that we are to judge of the sincerity of our repentance, rather by its abiding fruits, than by any remarkable circumstances which preceded it.

2. Our subject farther teaches us, that they only are led by the Spirit of God, who are of a dovelike temper.

True christians have in them the mind, which was in Christ, and which was emblematically signified in the gentle and dovelike descent of the Spirit upon him.

The spirit of God is said to dwell in the hearts of believers. They are required to be filled with the Spirit. Their having the spirit is the test, by which they are to judge, whether they belong to Christ. "Hereby we know that Christ is in us, because he hath given us of the spirit." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Now, whether we have the spirit of Christ, or not, must be determined by enquiring, whether we have that benevolent, pure, peaceable and humble

temper, which the Spirit produces and preserves in those hearts where he makes his residence. Let us always remember, that the Spirit comes like the dove.

The divine influence will not render men haughty and turbulent, contentious and passionate, stiff and overbearing, but calm and serious, modest and teachable, mild and condescending. "The wisdom which is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." The apostle says, "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets; for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace." This observation he makes in opposition to those who excused their disorderly conduct, by alleging, that they were under the high operations of the Spirit. He would have them believe, that a divine operation never produced confusion in the mind, or disturbance in the church—never rendered men irrational in their conduct, or troublesome to their brethren—never was carried to such a height, as to deprive them of selfcommand, and transform them into madmen.

It is absurd then to impute to an uncommon influence of the Spirit any error of conduct, excess of passion, extravagance of zeal, or bitterness of censure; for the Spirit comes like the dove. He is in the still, small voice; not in the storm, the earthquake and the fire. The fruits of the Spirit are, like his influences, sweet and benevolent. These are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness, faith and temperance. In these the main substance of religion consists.

True religion makes men humble and selfdistrustful; not arrogant and vain. It will not dispose them to talk much of their own goodness; but to shew out of a good conversation their works with

meekness of wisdom. It will not prompt the new-convert, or youthful penitent, to assume the publick teacher and reprover, but will make him swift to hear and slow to speak. It will not render the stomachs of new born babes difficult and squeamish, and apt to be disgusted with plain and wholesome food—it will teach them to lay apart all guile and hypocrisy, and envy and evil speakings, and to seek the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby. It will urge men often to the humble exercises of devotion—to selfexamination, confession, repentance and prayer. But it will not turn the secret devotions of the closet into loud, ostentatious, pharisaical prayers. It will warm the heart with godly zeal: But this zeal will choose to employ itself chiefly at home, in personal repentance and reformation. Whenever it goes abroad, it will take for its companions, Humility, Prudence and Charity. Bitter zeal descends not from heaven. It is not the fruit of that Spirit, which comes like the dove. "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God; but the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them who make peace."

That enlightening and convincing influence, which discovers to one the corruptions of his own heart, will, of course, make him humble. It will dispose him to think others better than himself—not to say, "Stand by yourselves, come not near to me, for I am holier than you." That temper, which is a fruit of the spirit, laments the prevalence of errour and wickedness. But while it labours to promote christian purity, it labours also to promote charity and peace. While it longs for greater unity of sentiment, it is chiefly solicitous to see a unity of affection, among christian professors. It reprobates none for small differences, but judges with candour, and studies the things which make for mutual edification.

It is by the exercise of such a dovelike temper, that we gain satisfactory evidence of our having the spirit of Christ. Whatever warmth of affection we may have felt on certain occasions; if, in our general conduct, we obey the motions of the flesh, we are not led by the spirit. If we walk in the spirit, we shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.

3. Our subject reminds us of our obligation, to adorn with good works our Christian character, and to recommend to the choice of others the religion which we profess. We should resemble the dove, whose wings are covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.

Christians are exhorted to provide things honest in the sight of all men—to adorn the doctrine of their Saviour in all things—to take heed, that their good be not evil spoken of—to think especially of those things, which are of good report.

That we may beautify our christian professions we must see that our *lives* correspond with it. "Let every one who nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity." If in words, we profess to know Christ, but in works deny him, we are abominable. We disgrace our profession and expose it to contempt. We represent religion as an empty, unmeaning thing. Paul says, "Though I speak with the tongue of men and angels, and have not charity, I am as sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal."

We must maintain the *universal* practice of duty. "Then shall we not be ashamed, when we have respect to all God's commandments." The beauty of religion appears in its selfconsistency and uniformity. If we seem to be strict and conscientious in some things, while we are loose and careless in others, our religion is disjointed, misshapen and deformed.

We must particularly attend to the more *important* parts of religion. He who is scrupulous in trifles, and licentious in matters of real obligation—he who is severe to condemn other people's errors, and yet admits palpable vice in his own practice, shews himself to be a hypocrite in heart, while, with his mouth, he pretends much zeal.

The beauty of religion much depends on our maintaining the more *amiable* and *engaging* virtues; such as charity, peaceableness, humility and meekness. However serious, devout and godly we may seem, if we are selfish, dishonest, contentious, haughty, rigid and censorious, our religion makes but an unsightly and forbidding appearance.

A meek and quiet spirit is an ornament of great price in the sight of God, and of peculiar beauty in the sight of men.

Christian *prudence* is also very necessary, that we may enjoy the comfort and display the beauty of our religion. We are required to be *wise*, as well as harmless—to walk in wisdom, and shew our works with meekness of wisdom. The pious christian, acting under the direction of prudence, does every duty in its proper time, and attends to various parts of religion in their place, and according to their importance, so that all coincide and unite in a beautiful order and symmetry. While he is constant and exact in things of real obligation; in matters of indifference he is easy and condescending. And while he acts with a liberality of sentiment, which will be fettered by no human systems, and enslaved to no human customs, he avoids, in his discourse and actions, those incautious freedoms, which, however innocent in themselves, might grieve the tender minds of his brethren, or embolden sinners to transgress.

4. Our subject teaches us our obligation to labour for the increase of Christ's church—not only to en-

ter into it ourselves, but also to encourage others to come and join themselves to it.

The spirit of the gospel is represented by the symbol of the dove. This species of birds, loves to mingle in flocks. Hence the increase of the church is expressed by the flying of doves to their windows.

Christ came into the world to receive to himself a kingdom. He has purchased a church with his own blood. He sends forth his servants, to invite all, as many as they find, both bad and good, to come into it, that it may be filled. When, in the increase of subjects, he sees the travail of his soul, he is satisfied.

They who come into his church, should bring with them a dovelike temper. They should come sensible of our guilt and weakness, trusting in his grace and power for their security. They should come with pure and upright intentions, with humble thoughts of themselves, with meekness and love to mankind, and with a fixed purpose to maintain their fidelity to Christ, and to one another.

That they may strengthen their faith and charity, and confirm their pious resolutions, they must attend on the ordinances of Christ's house; and that they may promote his cause and bring honour to his name, they must invite and encourage the attendance of others. They must throw no impediments in the way of his little ones; but rather prepare the way, gather out the stones, and take up the stumbling blocks.

There are many things, which hinder the growth of Christ's church. These we should be solicitous to remove.

The careless and irregular lives of christian professors are a stumbling block to many.

However unjust it may be, there are many who will reproach the whole church for the faults of par-

ticular members. And such reproaches often operate as hinderances to serious people, who would gladly enjoy the privileges of religious communion. If a church countenances, or tolerates known immoralities in any of her members, she becomes a partaker of their guilt. But there may be irregularities, which are known only to a few, and for which the church collectively is not responsible. And there are many unguarded liberties taken by professors, which, though really dishonourable to religion, cannot easily be made matters of publick discipline.

Now, as we would prevent, or remove such stumbling blocks, we must walk inoffensively ourselves; and, when there is occasion, reprove and exhort one another in the spirit of meekness. The way to promote the purity of the church is prescribed by the apostle. "Let us cleanse *ourselves* from all filthiness of the flesh and of the Spirit."

Controversies among christians often have an unhappy influence on the young and tender. When they see the professors of the same religion withdrawing from each other's fellowship for differences in doctrine or discipline, they are thrown into doubts, what denomination to choose, and eventually perhaps they think contemptuously of all, and join with none.

To remove this stumbling block, we must behave toward each other with the dovelike spirit of meekness, condescension and love—never contend about little things, nor renounce communion with a church for trivial errors. To reject a church, which God has received, is to exalt ourselves above him. And, concerning every church, we are to hope, that God has received her till she appears to have admitted essential corruptions; and to ratain them, after means of reformation have been used.

Some cast stumbling blocks in the way of others, by demanding in a church greater purity, than any means, which Christ has put into our hands, are competent to effect.

No church on earth, however good are her aims, and however vigilant her discipline, can prevent all impurity. Even the churches planted by the apostles had some corrupt and ungodly members. "The kingdom of God is like a net cast into the sea, which gathers of every kind; and when they have brought it on shore, they gather the good into vessels, and cast the bad away. So shall it be in the end of the world. Then the wicked shall be severed from among the just."

Now if we reprobate in the gross those churches, which have in their communion some unregenerate persons, we lay stumbling blocks before the weak; for, Where shall a church be found, to which they may venture to join?

Some lay hinderances in the way of others, by scandalizing the churches of Christ, as if they *professedly* received, and *knowingly* tolerated wicked and ungodly persons.

This, I suppose, is a groundless reproach. However negligent some churches may be in the discipline of offenders, yet I know of none which acts on so lax a principle. The churches require of their members a professed belief of, and subjection to the gospel of Christ; but they pretend not to be judges of the sincerity of the heart. They may probably admit, and retain some, who give not all that evidence of their real godliness, which might be wished: But then it should be considered, that they are vested with no other authority than what Christ has given them in his word; and that this is given for edification, not for destruction. They have from him no warrant to exclude men from the privileges of his house, but in a way of discipline. They

may not cut them off arbitrarily, but only by a manifestation of their wickedness.

Some embarrass the way to Christ's church by dreadful representations of the peculiar guilt incurred by approaching it in unregeneracy. They state the case in such a manner, that many will conclude, it is safest to forbear, until they have full and indubitable evidence of their conversion.

But this is stating the case incautiously. Christ commands all to come into his church, and to come in the sincerity of repentance and faith. He allows no man to turn away from it; and no man to enter into it for vile and wicked ends. A person's doubts concerning the goodness of his state, are not a reason why he should neglect this, or any other duty; but a reason, why he should examine himself, repent of his sins, and amend his ways. No man should be deterred from entering into the church, by an apprehension, that this, if he is unconverted, will be a greater sin than to absent himself. For he is not to deliberate how he may sin most safely, but to be watchful that he may not sin at all. The wicked man is no where safe, neither in the church, nor out of it. He who came to the marriage, and continued there without a wedding garment, and they who refused to come at all, were punished with equal severity. No man ought to attend on divine ordinances, in a formal and hypocritical manner; and no serious person ought to neglect them, from doubts concerning his habitual state. Let every one examine his present views and aims. He who is conscious that he acts under a sense of his obligation to God, and with a desire and intention to do his will, may be encouraged from hence to draw near to him; nor should he indulge the apprehension, that there is for him greater safety without, than within the church; or real safety any where, but in the path of duty, and in a state of favour with God.

Permit me to add:—There are some professors of religion, who greatly obstruct the growth and edification of the church, by their imprudent cavils at the preaching, and illiberal animadversions on the conduct of ministers, especially in the presence of children and youth, and in the company of the weak, unstable and disaffected. We, who are ministers, are conscious of many imperfections; and we thank our people when they favour us with their friendly advice. But if they only talk against us by the walls, and in the doors of their houses, we consider them, as obstructing our influence, and weakening our hands; as encouraging the enemies of religion, and pulling down the church of Christ, which we should all unite to build up and establish.

To conclude. As we wish to promote the growth of Christ's church, let us walk worthy of him, who has called us to his kingdom and glory; study the things which make for peace; condescend to each other in cases of difference; contribute to the purity of the church by the holiness of our own lives; encourage those in whom hopeful dispositions appear; lead them by our counsels and examples; thus prepare the way and take up the stumbling blocks which cause many to fall; and let us pray for the happy time, when converts shall flock into the kingdom of Christ as clouds, and as doves to their windows.

SERMON XX.

Parting with Friends, a painful Trial.

PSALM lxxxviii, 18.

Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.

THE author of this psalm is called *Heman* the Ezrahite. He was not the celebrated musician of that name, who lived in David's time; for that was a descendant of *Levy* from his son *Kohath*, and therefore called a *Kohathite*. This was probably a descendant of *Judah* from his son *Zerah*. In what time he lived, and on what occasion he composed this psalm, is uncertain. From several expressions, however, in the psalm, it is probable, that he lived in the time of the captivity; and, being a person of distinction, was confined in some lonely prison, and excluded from intercourse with his particular friends. It is evident, at least, that some distressing affliction gave occasion to these meditations; for they all run in a pensive and mournful strain. In his affliction, there was one circumstance, which he felt with the most tender sensibility; and that was

separation from his former acquaintance. He says, verse 8th, "Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; and hast made me an abomination to them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth." The same complaint he repeats at the close of the psalm.—"Lover and friend, hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness."

Many of his near friends, probably, were dead, having been slain by the Chaldeans. Some, perhaps, were confined in prisons remote from him, so that he could receive no visits from them. He could only sit and mourn, in solitude, his painful condition. That soft and tender solace, which sympathizing conversation among fellow sufferers is wont to afford, was now denied to him. But there was one consolation, of which the world could not deprive him, communion with God and meditation on his providence.

The words of our text will lead us to contemplate, the pleasures and advantages of friendship, the painful trial of parting with friends, and the consolation, which, under such trials, is derived from a belief of God's governing providence.

I. The happiness of life greatly depends on intimate friendships.

God made man for society; and it is not good for him to be alone. In a state of solitude, he could neither enjoy the world, nor himself. His natural passions prompt him, and his unavoidable wants impel him, to associate with others.

The power of speech, given us by the Creator, shews that we were designed for mutual intercourse; for, in solitude, this faculty would be useless.

We are naturally dependent on one another. No man is sufficient to relieve his own necessities. It is by an interchange of cares and labours, that mankind subsist in a tolerable condition.

Man alone would make but slow progress in mental improvement. It is by mutual communication of experience and acquirement, that our powers are enlarged, and our knowledge advanced. The knowledge which one acquires would be of but small use, if it was confined to himself; and more than half the pleasure of it would be lost to himself, if he had not opportunity to impart it to others.

As we cannot maintain an actual intercourse with the human race in general, we are naturally led to form particular friendships. Heman, among his acquaintance, found some who were his friends and lovers. The divine Saviour, whose benevolence extended to all men, embraced some as his intimate friends. He regarded with special affection, those who received his doctrines. Among the believers in Judea, there were some whose houses he made the place of his retreat; and, in the family of his disciples, there was one, distinguished by the name of disciple whom he loved.

In this world of change and trial, we find much satisfaction and refreshment in having friends near us, with whom we may often converse—to whom we can communicate our sentiments and feelings—from whom we can receive advice and assistance in our troubles—and in whose fidelity and affection we can place unsuspecting confidence.

Such friendships are always useful; but their importance is never so sensibly realized as in times of adversity. When burdens lie heavy upon us, and our strength is sinking under them, we rejoice to find one at hand, on whose friendly arm we can lean—into whose open bosom we can pour our complaints—and whose sympathizing prayers will ascend with ours to the throne of grace.

Heman says, "My soul is full of troubles; I am as a man who has no strength—my acquaintance is

put far from me." A more melancholly state, than this which he describes, can hardly be imagined—pressed with sorrow, deprived of strength, and removed from friends.

Friendship is necessary on religious accounts.

Religion itself is of a social nature. It greatly consists in benevolent dispositions and friendly offices. Friendship, founded on virtuous principles, softens and humanizes the heart, and promotes a general philanthropy—a good will to all around us. In the progress of the christian temper, we add to brotherly kindness, charity. By what we feel in our own particular connexions, we learn what others feel in theirs, and thus we more sensibly interest ourselves in their joys and sorrows.

Virtuous friendship, is subservient to piety. Mutual example and conversation warm a godly zeal, confirm good resolutions, fortify the soul against temptations, and facilitate the difficult duties of religion. "Iron sharpeneth Iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend:"—"Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: So doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel."

There is no kind of friendship so intimate and useful, as the *domestick*. This, perhaps, our Psalmist had particularly in view when he spake, in such an affectionate manner, of the removal of acquaintance, lover and friend.

This friendship, which is usually founded in affection, is strengthened and confirmed by unity of interest, reciprocal offices of kindness, and daily intercourse and conversation. In the expressive language of scripture, the parties are "one flesh." Their views, designs and concerns are the same, they have a common relation to those who descend from them—their affections meet and mingle in the same objects—and, by degrees, the fibres of their hearts become so interwoven and intwisted, that a

separation cannot be made without distressing pangs and bleeding wounds.

We proposed,

II. To contemplate the painful trial of parting with intimate friends. This Heman laments as the severest circumstance in his affliction, that "lover and friend were put far from him." The removal of any friend is an affliction that must be felt, but nothing wounds the heart so deeply as the dissolution of the conjugal connexion. This crosses the strongest affection, and frustrates the most pleasing hopes of the surviving partner. It brings on a gloomy train of new and unexperienced cares. Every rising care revives a pungent sense of the loss sustained. In former afflictions, there was the solace of mutual sympathy. In this the pensive mourner sits alone and keeps silence, finding none, to whom the feelings of the heart can be communicated, or who can take an equal share in its anguish. The anguish is augmented by a recollection of past delights, which now are fled, to return no more. The sight of children deprived of one who naturally cared for them, swells the tide of grief. When the desolate mourner walks abroad, nature appears covered with a gloom; and when he treads the empty chamber, absorbed in silent meditation, the hollow dome sadly echoes to the sound of his feet, and mournfully whispers back his deep fetched sighs. Every object which meets his eyes—every sound which strikes his ears, reminds him that lover and friend is put far from him, and his acquaintance into darkness.

Reflection easily convinces us, that such an affliction is great: How great, experience only can realize.

The scripture, which is always just and natural in its descriptions, places this among the most grievous adversities. God says to the prophet Ezekiel,

"Son of man, behold, I take away from thee, the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: Yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep; neither shall tears run down thy cheeks."—This is not to be understood as a general prohibition of mourning for the loss of friends; but as an intimation, that the prophet's, affliction would be so great and sudden, as to confound and astonish him, lock up the avenues of tears, and render him incapable of the relief which nature affords in more moderate afflictions. In this, Ezekiel was a sign to the children of Israel. He says, "I spake to the people in the morning, and at even my wife died; and I did as I was commanded. And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us, what these things are to us? And I answered them, Thus saith the Lord, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, and the desire of your eyes; and that which your soul pitieth; and your children shall fall by the sword; and ye shall do as I have done; ye shall not mourn nor weep, but shall pine away in your iniquities."—The greatness of that distress, which should attend the desolation of Judea, is here aptly represented by the sudden death of the prophet's wife; an event which left him in such solitary, deep felt anguish, as groans could not express, nor tears relieve.

A state of great and helpless calamity, is also expressed by a state of widowhood. The prophet Jeremiah describing the desolation of Jerusalem, says, "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people! How is she become a widow! She hath none to comfort her." Widowhood is considered, in scripture, as a state peculiarly helpless and pitiable.

Hence we meet with so many cautions not to oppress the widow; and so many injunctions to relieve and defend her. The apostles considered the

cases of those who were widows and desolate, as intitled to special attention. For such the primitive church made particular provision. When Jesus saw the breathless body of a young man carried forth to the grave, a circumstance in the case, which touched his benevolent heart, was, that this was the only son of his mother and she was a widow. Pitying her affliction, he stopped the procession, awoke the dead and restored him to her alive.

The language of scripture, in such tender cases, corresponds with the feelings of nature.

We proceed to shew,

III. That in this, as indeed in every affliction, the best consolation is drawn from a belief of, and meditation upon, God's governing providence.

In the loss of friends, Heman acknowledged God's holy and sovereign hand. "*Thou* hast put them far from me."

This consideration silenced David's complaint: "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." Job felt the influence of the same sentiment. "The Lord gave; and he hath taken away; and blessed be his name."

All events are under the direction of God's hand. The circumstances of our life, the time and manner of our death, the relations which we sustain, and the continuance and dissolution of the connexions which we form, are ordered and determined by his providence. To him the scripture ascribes, not only great, but small; not only miraculous, but common occurrences; not only the suspension, but the operation of the laws of nature; yea also, the events in which human agency is concerned, as well as those which seem to proceed more immediately from him.

Hence good men derive their strongest consolation amidst the vicissitudes and adversities of this mortal state.

God is supreme and above all: He gives not an account of his matters: Who shall say to him, What doest thou? Though he is high, he has respect to the lowly; the hairs of their head are all numbered. Though his judgments are unsearchable, yet we know that they are right, and no injury can we fear from him. His wisdom is perfect; it clearly views every circumstance of our condition, and exactly traces all the connexions of things, even to the remotest ages of eternity; it can judge for us with safety in seasons of greatest darkness; and can overrule, for our good, the afflictions which are most threatening in their appearance, and most painful to bear. He is very pitiful and of tender mercy: He afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men; but corrects them for their profit, that they may be partakers of his holiness; he is a very present help to those who are in trouble; he invites them to call upon him, and assures them of his gracious attention. And though what he does, they know not now, he has given them his faithful promise, that no evil shall happen to the just, but all things shall work together for their good.

This life is a short period of probation for eternal happiness. In the prospect of approaching glory, believers may rejoice, though now, for a season, if need be, they are in heaviness, through manifold temptations.

A state of mortality must necessarily be attended with affliction. The connexions and relations, which exist among the human race, are proper for the present state. We could not subsist, nor the world be continued without them. The reciprocal affection which results from these connexions, is exceedingly useful and happy. It sweetens and endears the relations of life, and facilitates the relative and social duties. But still it is a spring of bitter anguish, when these connexions are broken.

Without it we cannot enjoy the pleasures, nor discharge the duties, of friendship. And while we have it, we cannot but feel the stroke, which parts from us lover and friend, and hides them long in darkness. Affliction must therefore be an attendant on such a condition as the Creator has here assigned us.

We wonder, perhaps, why so benevolent a Being should place his creatures in a condition subject to so much sorrow. But we should reflect, that this affection, from which sorrow springs, is, on the whole, a source of superiour enjoyment. We derive from it more pleasure than pain. The greater part of our present happiness arises from friendship and society. The love which unites friends, makes their connexion happy while it lasts. It is the lot of most men to enjoy, through life, more friends than they lose. The pain of separation is indeed more pungent, but less permanent, than the pleasure of the union. Time, reason and grace, improve and heighten the latter, but kindly mitigate and soften the former.

Let it also be remembered, that this life is only a small part of our existence—a short trial in order to lasting happiness; and "these present light afflictions, which are but for a moment, are working for us a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory."

They admonish us of the shortness of life and quicken us to improve it.

Cool lectures on human frailty, and general observations on the mortality of our race, often leave the heart unaffected. But the removal of a near and intimate friend brings the thoughts of death home to our feelings. When the awful stroke comes within the walls of our own chamber—within the curtains of our own bed, we cannot resist the impression of this serious truth, that *we* must also fall. We shall

then, if at any time, feel how short and transient this life is; enter into a serious examination of ourselves; and form new resolutions to improve the uncertain remains of life in the practice of religion.

The vanity of the world never appears more manifest, than when they, on whom our worldly joys chiefly depended, are removed into darkness. How empty the world looks to one, whom lover and friend have forsaken; What finds he now worth living for? In this solitary condition his meditations will rise to that better state, where more lasting connexions will be formed, and these melancholy changes will afflict him no more.

The removal of friends is an admonition to draw near to God, and place our hope in him. "She that is a widow indeed, trusts in God, and continues in prayers and supplications night and day." And well she may; for God, her maker and her husband, has given her this kind invitation and promise, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them; and let the widow trust in me." When friends are about us, we place a confidence, alas! too great a confidence in them, when they are put into darkness, we feel how just is this caution, "Trust not in man, whose breath is in his nostrils; For wherein is he to be accounted of?" We then repair to God as the only unfailing friend. On him we cast our cares, and to him we make known our requests. We find our souls more enlarged in communion with him; can open our hearts more freely and fully; perceive a greater sensibility of mind, fervency of desire, fixedness of attention, and copiousness of expression, than we ever found in those dull periods of life, when prosperity deadened our affections, and the world engrossed our thoughts.

Religion now stands confessed in its reality and importance.

In the smooth seasons of life, we can pass along with little help from religion. We satisfy ourselves, perhaps, with a general belief of its truth, and a formal attendance on its duties. But in the day of affliction, we find no source of real comfort, but in religion. We look not to the world for relief; for this we see to be full of sorrow and disappointment. It is only a belief of God's perfections and government, a consciousness of our love to him, an application of his promises and a hope of future joys, that can make affliction sit soft and easy upon us, and enable us with dignity to sustain its weight.

When a friend is removed, we naturally think how important religion was to him: But our thoughts, which anxiously follow him to another world, soon returns back in this homefelt reflection; "As necessary as religion was to him, so necessary it is to us. We are as mortal as he was. Our solicitude must be no more about those who are gone before us; but about ourselves who are soon to follow them."

We now learn the reasonableness of contentment.

At ordinary times, how anxious are we about our worldly condition! How fearful of this and the other possible evil! How easily discomposed by trifling incidents! But now, when a real affliction has befallen us, trifles appear what they are. We see that former occasions of disquietude, were unworthy of the attention which we gave them. We now think, we could submit to them all, without one uneasy thought, if we might be, as in months past, when our lover and friend was with us. We now learn to rebuke those foolish anxieties, which, in prosperous days, so often vexed our spirits, and imbittered our comforts.

Affliction teaches us humility.

When we look on the breathless remains of an intimate friend, we see what all men are—what we

ourselves are—creatures of dust, returning to dust again. What is all the glory of man, but a fading flower? What is all the pride of worldly distinction, but vanity and corruption? What can we see, as a pretence for exultation, in ourselves, who are sinners, under sentence of death?

Affliction teaches us compassion.

While we feel the sorrow which attends the dissolution of our intimate connexions, we learn what others feel in similar trials: We see the propriety of the apostle's advice; "Remember them who are in bonds, as bound with them; and those who suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body."

Finally;——The death of friends is of use to awaken into exercise our faith in Jesus Christ, who died to redeem us from the grave; has risen to assure us of immortality, has ascended to prepare for us a place in heaven; and now lives that we might live also.

Let us extend our views to that glorious state whither he is gone; live under the influence of his religion, in imitation of his example, and in the hopes of his kingdom; and thus console our hearts in all the sorrows of life, reckoning that all the sufferings of the present time, are unworthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.

SERMON XXI.

Thankfulness to God for his daily Benefits.

PSALM, lxviii. 19.

Blessed be the Lord who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.

A BEING, whose presence pervades the universe, whose power sustains all worlds, and whose goodness supplies the wants of every living thing, is the most grand and delightful thought, that can fill and warm the human mind. To contemplate the perfections and works of this Being, to adore him for what he is, and praise him for what he does, is the noblest exercise, that can employ a rational creature. This is the principal work of angels and saints in heaven, and not a small part of the employment of godly souls on earth.

Sudden and surprising interpositions of providence may deeply affect those, who in ordinary circumstances, live without God in the world. But they, whose minds are formed to an habitual sense of his government, will seriously observe his daily benefits, and regard them as calls to daily devotion. Under a sense of *these*, David was pressed with a

load of gratitude, of which he could disburthen himself only by daily praise.

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits."

To illustrate the propriety of this acknowledgment; and to shew our obligations to praise our great Benefactor, is the design of the present discourse.

I. We will illustrate the propriety of David's thankful acknowledgment.

Common and daily mercies are those, with which we are principally loaded. From them arise our highest obligations to gratitude. For,

1. God's daily benefits are, by far, the most *numerous.*

"How precious are his thoughts unto us? How great is the sum of them? If we should count them, they are more in number than the sand."—"How many are the wonderful works, which he has done; and his thoughts which are to usward! They cannot be reckoned up in order to him. If we would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered."

The frame of our bodies, and the faculties of our minds display the goodness of the Creator. "I will praise thee," says David, "for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well."

How curious, and complicated is the body in which we reside! Every part is adapted to some important end. Every member has its obvious use: Every vessel and fibre answers some essential purpose in the animal economy.

The several senses are ministers of information and enjoyment. They stand as monitors to warn us of danger, and wait as guides to direct us in our path.

As this decaying frame is kept in repair by con-

tinual nutrition, the Creator has put within us an appetite for our necessary food, that the daily use of it may be accompanied with delight, and the means of procuring it may be pursued with cheerfulness.

The natural passions, acting in their proper places, appear to be essential parts of our constitution, and display the wisdom and goodness of him who made us. *Fear* guards us from danger—desire quickens our pursuit of happiness—*hope* animates and sweetens our labours—*shame* restrains us from unworthy actions—*love* unites us in society—*compassion* interests us in each other's welfare, and prompts our exertions for the relief of distress.

As our infant state is helpless and dependent, God has implanted in the parent's breast a strong affection for his offspring, which, while it secures them from neglect, sweetens his duty to them, and comforts him in the toil of his hands.

To preside over the inferior powers, the inspiration of the Almighty has given us understanding. This elevates us above the animal tribes, and renders us capable of superiour services, enjoyments and prospects.

"The earth is full of his riches." The table of his providence is widely spread, and bountifully furnished, to supply our outward wants, and gratify our natural desires.

"The heavens declare his glory: The sun enlightens and warms us with his beams; and when he retires, the moon and stars hang out their lamps to abate the gloom and soften the horrors of night. The winds, by their various motions, preserve the salubrity of the air, waft around the clouds freighted with enriching showers, mitigate the sultry heat of the summer's sun, kindly fan the weary laborer and the panting animal, facilitate the process of vegetation, and aid the intercourse of distant nations.

We are visited with unfailing returns of day and night, which alternately invite us to labour and rest. The vicissitude of the seasons, without which the greater part of the globe would be incapable of habitation, is regularly maintained.

The heavens and the earth hold out to our view, various objects of contemplation for the improvement of the mind. They present us with scenes of grandeur to strike us with astonishment: They exhibit works of wisdom to raise our admiration: They discover endless proofs of divine bounty to excite our gratitude.

Besides these daily benefits, which are common to all, every one may recollect a thousand personal and domestick favours; such as the continuance of his reason and health; success in his calling; deliverance from danger; a capacity for refreshment and repose; the joys of peace and friendship; and quietness and safety in his dwelling. God compasses our paths by day, and our beds by night: He keeps us while we sleep; and when we awake we are still with him. To the blessings of his providence are added those of his grace. By his lively oracles and instituted worship, he affords us the means of spiritual knowledge and comfort. Through the redemption of his Son he offers us the pardon of sin, the assistance of his spirit, access to him in prayer, and the light of his countenance.

These are not transient, but permanent privileges. He continues them to us, until, by putting them away, we judge ourselves unworthy of them. Lo, these are a part of his ways. In vain we attempt to recount his benefits; As well may we number the stars of heaven, which, while we gaze, lose all distinction, and mingle in one general glow.

2. Daily benefits are the *greatest* in their nature.

These are essential not only to our temporary existence in this life, but to our eternal happiness in

the next. Compared with *these*, the mercies, which we call *special*, are of small importance.

A providential deliverance from unforeseen danger will deeply affect the mind: But, Are we not more indebted to divine goodness for the prevention of such danger? It is a mercy to be snatched from the jaws of death: But, Is it not a superiour mercy to be preserved from falling into this extremity? Recovery from severe sickness is a favour: But, Is not continued health a far greater favour? The sudden accumulation of property, by God's blessing on our lawful designs, would be regarded, at least, with a transient gratitude: Shall we then forget the daily supply of our wants, and the daily success of our labours? These are bounties of superiour consequence.

Still more precious is the privilege of daily converse with God's word, access to his throne, hope in his mercy, and assistance from his spirit.

3. Daily benefits are the most *extensive*.

The man, in whom the benevolence of the gospel reigns, rejoices with them who rejoice. The pleasure which results from his personal blessings, is heightened by a participation in the blessings enjoyed by others. Special and extraordinary favours are the lot of but few, and of these but seldom. Ordinary mercies flow every where; they appear widely spread among the human race. In the contemplation of these, as enjoyed by mankind in general, the benevolent heart rejoices daily. In the view of the other it can rejoice but rarely, because they are thinly scattered, and seldom seen. Great riches, elevated honours, and remarkable success in business, if they are to be called benefits, yet are benefits vouchsafed to a small proportion of mankind; and they are oftener the objects of envy, than of real, sincere congratulation. They yield little satisfaction to the possessors, and little pleasure to the spectators. Common

mercies are so equably diffused, that they offer no provocation to envy; and so generally enjoyed, that the good man, every where, meets a gratification of his benevolent wishes.

The heavens declare the glory, and the earth displays the goodness of God to all men. The common Parent causes his sun to shine, and his showers to fall promiscuously, on the rich and the poor, on the evil and the good. The seasons dispense their influence, and the earth distributes its bounties without partiality. Health and competence are indulged to men in general, for much the greater part of life. There are few, who cannot number more days of ease, security and fulness, than of pain, terror and want.

The blessings of God's grace are held out to men, with a free and undistinguishing hand. Pardon is offered, on the same terms, to sinners of every description. The doors of heaven are set open for the reception of all who will enter. The aids and comforts of God's Spirit are promised, without exception, to all who seek them. In Christ Jesus there is neither bond nor free, Greek nor Jew, but all are one in him.

4. Common mercies are *permanent*, because they are *necessary*. Special benefits are but *occasional*, and therefore *transient*. We neither need them often, nor can enjoy them long. As they usually succeed some great affliction, or imminent danger, they are well suited to awaken the slumbering mind into gratitude and praise. But we cannot receive them often, because we are not often in adversity. We are continually with God. He guides us by his counsel, protects us by his power, and supplies us by his goodness. The mercies which attend us one day, return with the returning day. They fail not; they are new every morning.

We see how justly it may be said, "We are daily loaded with benefits," Our daily mercies are *innumerable*—they are of *infinite weight*—they are *constant*—they are extended to *all.*

While we enjoy them ourselves, we may look around, and see thousands sharing them with us, The pleasures of benevolence may unite with the joys of gratitude, to enliven and exalt our praise.

II. Let us now contemplate our obligations to render praise to the God of our salvation.

Blessings which flow from pure, selfmoving goodness and love, without any merit on our part, or selfishness on the part of the giver, are the proper matter of our thanksgiving. Such are all the blessings which come from God. It is not his own profit, nor our worthiness; but his mercy, and our necessity, which move him to bestow them. As he is possessed of infinite wisdom and power, he can need nothing from his creatures, and can have no motive out of himself—no motive but his own goodness, to dispense his favours to them. He is not worshipped by men's hands, as though he needed any thing from them, seeing he gives to them life, and breath and all things.—"Of him, through him, and to him are all things. To him be glory forever." We are not only dependent, but guilty: We have done nothing to merit, but much to forfeit, the blessings of God's love. In this view our obligations to gratitude are mightily increased. His mercies and our iniquities are heightened by the contrast. Our iniquities, committed against his rich mercy, are vastly aggravated. His mercy, exercised amidst all our guilt is inconceivably exalted. The Psalmist contemplates them together, that he may feel the stronger sense of both. "Many, O Lord, are thy wonderful works, and thy thoughts which are to usward. They are more than can be numbered."—"Mine iniquities have taken hold on

me, so that I cannot look up. They are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart faileth me."

For God's innumerable and unmerited benefits, our gratitude and obedience is a proper return; and the more so, because this is the only return we can make. "What shall I render to the Lord," says David, "for all his benefits? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord; I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving. I will pay my vows to the Lord."

Our obligation to praise God is as plain and undeniable, as our obligation to love, trust, or fear him. It arises from his character, and our relation to him. If we ought to love him, because he is perfect—to fear him because he is almighty—to trust in him because he is allsufficient; then we ought to be thankful to him and bless his name, because he is the God of salvation, who daily loads us with benefits.

"It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord; it is pleasant, and praise is comely." Praise employs our noblest powers, sweetens the temper, expels anxious cares, stills the murmurs of discontent, smooths the rude passions, and composes the soul, in the day of adversity, to cheerful hope and resignation.

What can disturb and ruffle a mind filled with a delightful sense of God's righteous government, and daily employed in the grateful contemplation of his wonderful goodness and love? This exercise is adapted to raise us above the world, and fit us for heaven. It is the employment of saints and angels there; and will be ours, when we arrive there.

Charity is greater than faith and hope, because these will cease with life; but that will never fail. Praise is better than prayer and humiliation, because these are exercises which belong only to the pres-

ent state; that will be the everlasting business of happy spirits above.

A pious man needs no arguments to evince his obligation to this duty. He feels it just as he feels his obligation to love and fear God. It is his very temper. A view of God's character excites his admiration and praise. A recollection of divine benefits awakens his gratitude and joy.

Our subject will easily suggest to us some useful reflections.

1. How vast are our obligations to our heavenly Benefactor!

If obligations are proportionable to benefits received, ours must be immense; for we are daily loaded with benefits. If a friend should relieve us in a time of helpless distress, or rescue us from death in the moment of despairing anguish, his kindness would leave on our hearts an impression of gratitude, which time could not obliterate. We should delight to see his face. We should often seek his company. With pleasure we should repeat to him, and relate to others, the story of our calamity and deliverance. And shall we forget the God of our salvation, who has not only rescued us from danger and distress, but prevented us with the blessings of his goodness? The blessings which he bestows are of infinite value, continued from day to day, and numerous as the moments of our lives. How our obligations increase! How should our gratitude swell and overflow! Who can utter the mighty acts of our God?—Who can shew forth all his praise! The grateful heart feels more than the mouth can express.—The Psalmist says, "Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion." The margin renders it more emphatically. "Praise is *silent* before thee." When praise attempts to speak God's goodness, it falters—it sinks into silence under the weight of the subject—it waits in solemn suspense

to know what to say; and, after all, rather admires than utters the memory of God's great goodness.

2. Our subject strongly urges us to daily devotion. The Psalmist says, "Every day will I praise thee, and bless thy name forever."——"It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord, to praise thy name, O most high; to shew forth thy loving kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness, every night."

The daily worship of God by prayer and thanksgiving, is a duty so plainly resulting from our continual dependence on him, and his unceasing bounty to us, that a thinking mind cannot but discern it, and a pious heart cannot but feel it. And if, in private devotion, we ought to recollect and acknowledge personal favours; for the same reason, families are bound to recognize their common blessings, and with united voices to express their common gratitude and joy.

3. How unreasonable is envy and discontent! When we look round on our fellow mortals, we see those whom we imagine to be in a more eligible condition than ourselves. But perhaps we misjudge. We see only the brighter side of their condition, and we attend to the dark side of our own. In our state, there are agreeable circumstances, which we overlook; in theirs, some circumstances of bitterness may lie concealed from our notice.

But whatever may be their condition, Can we not find, in our own, sufficient matter of praise? Who can say, he is not daily a subject of divine favours? Yea, daily loaded with them?—Shall we be dissatisfied with a condition, in which we daily experience more mercies than we can express?—Shall we envy the blessings of our neighbours, when our own amount to such a load, as all our gratitude cannot equal?

When we feel ungodly passions working within us, let us commune with our own hearts, and be still. Let us review the benefits which we have received, and meditate on those which we enjoy, and thus learn, in every state, to be content.

4. We see, that there is no occasion for anxiety about future events.

We have daily been loaded with God's mercies, and still we may trust ourselves in his hands.

Changes often take place in nations, in families, and in the condition of particular persons; but these changes are under the direction of a Being who never errs. Religion allows us, and prudence directs us, to guard against the evils which threaten our persons, our property, or our friends: But neither religion nor prudence permit us to indulge anxious fears. Has God ever forsaken us?—Has he not fed and clothed us by his bounty, guided us by his counsel, and protected us by his power?—Has he not smiled on our labours, and blessed the works of our hands?—And why may we not still rely on his care?—Has he not opened to the view of faith and hope a glorious world, in which dwell righteousness, peace and joy?—And shall we be solicitous about particular events, which may await us here?—What have we to do, we transient, itinerant beings, but to secure a title to that better world, to pursue the line of our duty here, to leave all events with God, and lay up for ourselves a treasure in the heavens? The good man is not afraid of evil tidings; His heart is fixed trusting in the Lord.

5. We have abundant reason for submission under the adversities of life.

As this is a state of probation, afflictions are necessary: But while we suffer them, we are loaded with benefits. Who can say, he has not received from the hand of God more good than evil—more blessings than calamities? We meet with disappointments;

but these are often the fruits of our own unreasonable expectations. Our prudent labours are oftener succeeded than blasted. We have days of pain and sickness: But more numerous are our days of health and quietness. We suffer the loss of friends; But we are not left solitary; other friends survive. Our substance may be providentially diminished: But still we have bread to eat, and raiment to put on. If we should experience the spoiling of our earthly goods; yet we have the means of providing for ourselves in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

After all this, Can we say, that we have cause to complain? The world may fall short of our wishes; but heaven will far exceed them.

6. Our subject calls upon us to abound in works of goodness.

If we are loaded with benefits, some of them we should communicate to those who need.

Though all around us share in the divine bounty, all share not alike. Some may want particular blessings which we enjoy; and we may want those which they enjoy. There ought then to be a reciprocation of benefits—an interchange of good offices. We are required to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. The apostle instructs us, that mutual benevolence ought to introduce among christians a kind of equality; that our abundance ought to afford a supply for the want of our brethren; and their abundance, at another time, or in another respect, ought to yield a supply for our want; according as it is written concerning the manna; He who gathered much, had nothing over, having communicated the overplus to him who had gathered less; and he who gathered little, had no lack, having received a supply from him who had gathered more.

This distribution to the necessities of others, is the noblest expression of our gratitude to God. The apostle says, "Let us offer to God the sacrifice of praise continually, giving thanks to his name; but to do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

SERMON XXII.

The Christian characterized, who has been with Jesus.

A SERMON *after the* COMMUNION.

ACTS iv. 13.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were ignorant and unlearned men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

THE two apostles here named, as they went up to the temple at the hour of prayer, met with a cripple, who, having from his birth, been unable to walk, was laid at the gate of the temple, to ask alms of the people, who came thither for devotion. Attentive to the design, for which he was placed there, he seems to have let none pass unsolicited. "Seeing Peter and John about to enter into the temple, he asked alms of them. Instead of giv-

ing him money, an article in which they did not abound, they exercised their charity in a more useful way. They said to him; "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And immediately he received strength, went with them into the temple, and joined in the praises of God.

The publicity and notoriety of the miracle rendered it, at once, a topick of common conversation. "The people were filled with amazement, and ran together greatly wondering." The apostles improved the occasion, to demonstrate the divine power and authority of Jesus of Nazareth, who had been rejected as an impostor, and crucified as a malefactor; and to exhort the people to repentance, for the remission of sins in his name. And their preaching, accompanied with so notable a miracle, had a mighty effect. Of those who heard the word, thousands believed, and acknowledged the Saviour.

Alarmed at the miracle and its consequences, the high priest summoned a council, called the apostles before him, and examined them, by what power, and in what name they had done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, answered, "Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel; if we be this day examined concerning the good deed done to this impotent man, by what means he is made whole: Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God hath raised from the dead, even by HIM doth this man stand before you whole. This is the stone, which is set at nought by you builders, which is become the head of the corner; neither is there salvation in any other." The freedom and assurance, with which the apostles spake, surprised the rulers. It is said, "When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled." They are called *unlearned*, and *ignorant*,

or *private* men, as the word may be rendered; *i. e.* men of private education. They were not men, who *then* appeared unlearned and ignorant. The freedom with which they spake, the knowledge which they discovered in the holy scriptures, especially in the ancient prophecies, and the force of their reasoning to prove that Jesus was the Christ, convinced the rulers, that they were, at that time, men of superiour abilities and acquirements. But it was matter of admiration, how these men, who had only had a private education, and never had been instructed in the Jewish schools, should discover such an uncommon degree of knowledge and boldness, to speak and argue in defence of their religion. So the Jews, when they heard Jesus teach in the temple, marvelled, saying, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?"——"But, it is added, the rulers took knowledge of these men, that they had been with Jesus." This was sufficient to account for their superiour knowledge and boldness.

It is here observable, that though Christ chose for his disciples, men of private education, yet he sent them not forth to preach his gospel, until they had been for some time, under his own immediate instruction. Paul, whose early education had been superiour, was soon after his conversion, employed in the ministry. But still he was previously instructed in the doctrines of the gospel by Ananias, who was sent to him for that purpose. Even in that day, when uncommon gifts were bestowed by the immediate power of the Spirit, a preparatory education was ordinarily required to furnish men for the gospel ministry. Novices were not to be introduced into so great and important an office. The apostle to the Hebrews intimates, that there must be time spent in learning the principles of the oracles of God, and in going on from thence to

more perfect knowledge, before men are qualified to become teachers of others. How absurd is it then, in this day, when prophecy has failed, and the supernatural gift of knowledge has ceased, for the unlearned and ignorant to assume, without a previous education, the work of publick instruction?

But not to enlarge on this incidental thought; what I would especially notice in the words, is the happy influence of an acquaintance with Christ.

The Jewish rulers saw something in these apostles, which appeared marvellous, until they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

We will consider, How the expression of *being with Jesus*, may be applied to others, as well as to his immediate disciples: And how they, who have been with him, ought to distinguish themselves.

I. The expression of *being with Jesus* may be applied to many others, as well as to his immediate disciples.

1. It may be applied to all who enjoy the gospel.

Peter and John, and their fellow disciples, were favoured with a personal knowledge of, and admitted to familiar converse with their divine Lord. Being daily in his company, they could hear his excellent instructions, observe his heavenly life, behold his wonderful works, and take a part in his sublime devotions. Happy disciples! How great was their privilege?—But is yours inferiour? You have his gospel. This communicates to you the instructions which they heard—the works which they beheld—the example which they followed—and the devotions in which they joined. In regard therefore to all the purposes of faith, knowledge and virtue, you may be with him, as truely as they were. You think, they had a peculiar advantage in hearing

his living voice, and seeing his living manners. And Would not they also say, You have a peculiar advantage in conversing with his written word, and in reviewing, at your pleasure, the things which you have learned? If a living voice will touch the heart more sensibly, yet it is more transient than the written word. This is much better adapted to enrich your memory, and improve your knowledge. What then could be expected of them as disciples of Jesus, more than may be expected of you? You think that men, who had been with Jesus, as they were, should daily live under the influence of his doctrines and in conformity to his example. And ought not you to do the same? You are as fully taught, as they were, how you ought to walk and to please God; and every motive, which they had, is also proposed to you. If you then, who have thus been with Jesus from your youth, and have ever lived under his instructions, are governed by the interests, and conformed to the manners of this world, What will you say in your own excuse?

2. There is a still higher sense in which the *true believer* has been with Jesus.

He has received the renewing influence of the spirit of Christ, and experienced the sanctifying power of his gospel. He has not only heard the Saviour's inviting voice, but has enjoyed fellowship with him, and been made a partaker of his grace. The most important intercourse, which the first disciples had with their Lord was of this kind. Barely to behold his works, and receive his instructions, was but a small thing, compared with the efficacious influence of his grace on their hearts. Of this every real believer is a subject; and therefore, in the highest and most eminent sense of the expression, he has been with Jesus. There was a miraculous power of the spirit, designed for the establishment of the gospel, which was peculiar to the apostolick

age. But the more gentle influence of the Spirit, which aids the efficacy of the gospel on those who hear it, is in a greater or less degree, common to all ages. Christ says, "The words, which I speak, they are spirit and they are life." The Spirit which Christ promised to his disciples, was to "abide with them always." The gospel is called "a ministration of the Spirit." In regard of his spirit, dwelling in the hearts of believers, Christ promises, that "He will come and make his abode with them."

If then you have received the spirit of Christ, in his renewing and comforting influence, you have, in the most desirable sense of the expression, been with him.—And ought you not to be distinguished from a wicked world? Ought you not to live in such a manner as will manifest your acquaintance and intimacy with him? If he has come and made his abode with you, will you not serve him in newness of spirit and purity of life? If you have been called to the fellowship of the Son of God, and to the communion of the Holy Ghost—if you are heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, then walk no more according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind, but walk in the Spirit, and manifest the life of Christ in your own. For you are debtors to live, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit—not according to the course of the world, but according to the pattern of your divine Redeemer.

3. As true believers have been with Jesus in their renovation by his Spirit; so there are times, when they have special intercourse and communion with him.

They are often with him in their *private devotions.*

He has commanded them to enter into their closet, and pray in secret to their heavenly Father, who will reward them openly. They are careful to obey the

command, and they experience the fulfilment of, the promise. When they draw near to God, with a humble sense of their wants and their unworthiness —with a believing view of Christ's power and grace —with earnest desires of the mercies which they need, and with lively hopes of obtaining them through his mediation; then may they be said to have been with him. Such a sensible interview will be accompanied with penitence for sin and resolutions against it—with greater indifference to the world—and with more ardent aspirations of soul after heaven and holiness.

But alas! how often does the christian feel such a deadness on his spirits, such a faintness in his desires, and such a languor in his affections, as scarcely to know, whether he has been with his Saviour, or has only made a formal visit to his closet. He retires without the refreshment, which he sometimes finds, because he has been there without the life, which he sometimes feels. The hypocrite is content with the formality of a visit. The sincere christian laments his languid faith, and unanimated devotion. He adopts the language of Job, "O that I knew where I might find him. I would come even to his seat; I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me." He examines his heart to find what secret iniquity has intercepted the glad beams of his Saviour's love. He calls to mind his sins, and lays them, in humble confession, before God. He labours to awaken in his soul greater life and fervour of devotion. And though, after all, he should not find that spirit and affection in duty, which he desires, still his resolution is fixed to walk with Christ in all holy conversation. In this resolution chiefly consists the power of godliness. The warmth of affection

may, even in good christians, be variable. And some, perhaps, imagine that religion decays in their souls in proportion as their devout affections cool. But this is not always the case. Do you still cleave to God with purpose of heart? Are your resolutions against every sin, and for every duty, as firm and steady as ever? Then interpret not the languor of your affections, as an indication of the decay of religion; but rather impute it to the infirmities of nature. "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Lively affections, well balanced, and wisely directed, are great helps to duty, and contribute much to the facility and pleasure of practical religion. But a heart, under the calm and rational influence of the great doctrines of the gospel, steadily fixed for God, and firmly resolved against every sin, is principally to be regarded.

As true christians are with Jesus in their private devotions, so they are often with him in *social worship.*

He has promised his disciples, "If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven; for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Christ has instituted social worship, and required his disciples to attend upon it, for their edification in knowledge, purity and love. When they, in regard to his institution, and in obedience to his command, associate in divine worship, they come together in his name. When thus they come together, he is in the midst of them, by the ministration of his word for their instruction, by the influence of his Spirit for their assistance, and by his gracious notice for their acceptance. If when we retire from the place, where he has appointed to meet us, we can, on reflection, find that we have received his word with corresponding purposes and

dispositions of soul—that we have felt its humbling and quickening power—that in social prayer our hearts have really joined—that desire has accompanied our petitions; humiliation, our confessions; gratitude, our praises; and charity, our intercessions; then may we say, We have been with Jesus.

Again: He has appointed his holy supper, as a medium of intercourse with him; and he requires our observance of it, that we may remember and shew forth his death. Here he represents his body wounded for our transgressions—our great guilt, which nothing but his blood could expiate—his amazing love in giving himself a sacrifice for us—the full pardon purchased by his death—and the necessity of repentance and newness of life, in order to our obtaining his great salvation. When we attend upon this ordinance with such views of Christ—with godly sorrow for our sins—with love and gratitude to him, who has died for us—with humble reliance on his atonement and intercession—and with fixed purposes of heart to honour him before men; then may we be said to have been with him.

When Jesus first instituted this ordinance, he attended it with his disciples. But if they had no other views of him, than what his bodily presence offered to their sight, they were with him to little purpose. The view, which faith gives of him, as a divine teacher and a spiritual Saviour, and such desires and resolutions, as this view is suited to inspire, are now, and were then, of principal importance in attending on this supper.

We have seen what it is to have been with Jesus.

II. We will now consider, how such as have been with him, ought to distinguish themselves.

The rulers of the Jews marvelled at the conduct of the two apostles, until they took knowledge of

them, that they had been with Jesus. The expression imports, that they, who had been formed by his example, and under his instructions, differed from the men of the world; and discovered such tempers and manners, as were, in some degree, peculiar to themselves.

It was Peter's earnest advice to those who professed their faith in Christ, that they should keep themselves from that untoward generation. It was Paul's exhortation to such, that they should not be conformed to this world, nor walk as the Gentiles walked; but should prove what was the acceptable will of God. It is said of those, who had felt the transforming power of the gospel, that the Gentiles with whom they had formerly walked, thought it strange, that they ran not with them still to the same excess of riot. Christ signifies to his disciples, that they should do more than others—should be as the salt of the earth—as a city set on a hill—as lights, to guide others in the way of truth.

You may then justly enquire, In what respects christians ought to be distinguished?

1. If you have been with Jesus, be watchful against all sin. You have seen him, who suffered death to redeem you from iniquity: How can you continue any longer therein? You have beheld him wounded for your transgressions, and bruised for your iniquities: Surely you will not dare to wound him again. If he has been crucified for you, you will not crucify him afresh, and put him to open shame; but you will crucify your vile affections, put on his character, and walk in his spirit.

2. If you have been with Christ, and trained up under his instructions, it may justly be expected, that you should excel in religious knowledge.

If his first disciples had come forth from under his tuition, as ignorant of his religion, as when he called them, Who would not have condemned their

stupidity? You enjoy his gospel which is able to make you wise unto salvation, and furnish you for every good work. If when, for the time, you might have been teachers of others, you have still need to be taught what are the first principles of the oracles of God, you are criminally dull of hearing.

3. If you have been with Jesus, then shew yourselves to be like him.

Learn of him to be meek and lowly, patient and contented, pious and heavenly. If the disciples, who lived with him, and were daily in his company, had caught nothing of his temper and manners, they would have discovered a stubborn and intractable mind. You have seen his amiable example drawn in his gospel—you have heard it described in the publick dispensation of his word—you have beheld him exhibited in the ordinance of the supper: And have you not learned to be like him?—Are you still like the men of the world—vain and haughty, covetous and ambitious, passionate and contentious?—Who would think, that you had been with Jesus? He was meek and gentle, peaceable and condescending, contented in poverty, and patient in adversity.

4. Set your affections on things in heaven, for Jesus is there.

He came to deliver you from this evil world. He submitted to poverty, to teach you the vanity of worldly wealth and honour. He died and rose again to point your thoughts, and draw your affections toward a superiour world.

If you have been conversant with him, it may be expected, that you should be dead to this world, and that your conversation should be in heaven. Your interest is there; let your hearts be there also. The apostle says to the Colossians, "You, being dead in your sins, God hath quickened with Christ; and, being baptised into his death, ye are risen with

him by the faith of the operation of God. If ye then be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."

5. It is observed of these apostles, that they discovered a marvellous zeal and fortitude in the cause of Christ. This was the effect of their acquaintance with him.

The spirit of his religion is a spirit of power and of a sound mind. It inspires with resolution and courage in times of opposition and danger. If we have seen Christ's example—his zeal for God—his contempt of the world—his perseverance in his work: If we have learned his doctrines, heard his promises and contemplated the glorious rewards which he has prepared for the faithful; we may be strong in the power of his might. If then we faint in the day of adversity, yield to temptations, or dissemble our religion in the presence of scoffers, we act as those, who have never been with Jesus.

6. The religion of Jesus breathes a spirit of love.

A pattern of the most exalted benevolence he himself has exhibited; and the same benevolence he has inculcated on his disciples. He has taught them to love one another—to love enemies—to love all men. It may then be expected of those, who are formed under his example and instructions, that "they should put away all bitterness, wrath, malice, envy, clamour and evil speaking; and put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, kindness, meekness and long suffering, forgiving one another, as Christ forgiveth them; and that, above all things, they put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."—"By this," says our Lord, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." If then we have nothing of his love, Shall we say, we have been with him? No: We have

not seen him, nor known him; or we have companied with him in vain.

Let us seriously apply these thoughts.

If we find not in ourselves the temper which was in Christ, let us humbly lament our neglect of the privileges which we enjoy, and more wisely improve them in future.

We see, when we may be said to make a proper use of ordinances, and to attend upon them acceptably. It is when we have so been with Christ as to learn his religion, and become conformed to it.

We have, this day, been near to Christ in his house, and at his table: Let us not walk according to the course of the world, but according to the pattern and precepts of our divine master. Let us, who have been so highly honoured of God, as to be called to the fellowship of his Son, depart from all iniquity, be zealous of good works, live above the world, and maintain a humble, contented, benevolent and peaceable spirit; thus men will be constrained to confess, that Jesus is among us of a truth.

SERMON XXIII.

The Impotent Man at the Pool of Bethesda.

JOHN v. 1—9.

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem, by the sheepmarket, a pool, which is called, in the Hebrew tongue, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water. Whosoever then, first after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he said unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him; Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth in before me. Jesus saith unto him, Arise, take up thy bed and walk. And immediately he was made whole, and took up his bed and walked. And on the same day was the sabbath.

THE feast here mentioned, on account of which Jesus went up to Jerusalem, was probably the passover; for at this, all the males were required to appear before God in the temple.

Though the Jewish church, in that day, had greatly degenerated from its ancient purity, and in

many things had departed from the divine institutions, yet Christ did not withdraw from her communion; but he constantly attended with her on the festivals appointed by the law.

The Evangelist says, "Now at Jerusalem, by the sheepmarket," or sheepgate, as it is elsewhere called, "there is a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bathesda, having five porches." The word rendered a *pool*, properly signifies a *bath*, or a place for *swimming*. It was just within the walls of the city, near one of the principal gates; and it had several porches, or covered walks, for the convenience of those, who came thither to bathe themselves.

"At a certain season," it is said, "an angel went down into the pool and troubled the water," or put it in motion; "whosoever then first after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had."

Some have conjectured, that the healing virtue of this water was derived from the entrails of the beasts, slain for sacrifice, which they suppose, were thrown into it; and that the angel, who stirred the water, was only a messenger, or officer, sent at certain times to put it in motion. But it seems altogether incredible, that water, from any natural cause, should cure *all sorts* of diseases—that its healing virtue should operate only at *particular seasons*—that it should help *only* the person who *first stepped* in—or that such multitudes should wait for a certain officer to come and stir the water; and should not rather do it themselves, or call on some person to do it for them. Nor does it appear probable, that the sacrifices were washed in this pool, as there was in the temple a laver for that purpose. It is manifest, therefore, that the efficacy of this water was miraculous.

This pool seems to have been the same which is elsewhere called the pool of *Shiloah*, or *Siloam*, whither Jesus sent the blind man to wash, after he had anointed his eyes with clay.

We find some allusions to it in the Old Testament.

The disobedience of the Jews to the mild government of the Prince of Peace, is, in the prophet, expressed by "their rufusing the waters of *Shiloah*, which go softly." The faith of such as received the gospel is foretold by a similar allusion. "With joy shall they draw water out of the *wells* of *salvation*," or the fountains of health. The word *Shiloah*, which signifies *one who was sent*, is a name by which the Messiah is called, in prophecy, particularly in that of Jacob, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah—until Shiloah come." As these waters were typical of Christ, and of the blessings which flow from him, God might communicate to them this healing virtue, to prepare the Jewsf or the reception of the true *Shiloah*, and to lead them unto that fountain, which he should open for uncleanness.

The historian tells us, that, in the porticoes of this pool, "lay a great multitude of impotent folk, blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water."

What pains men will take, even on the most doubtful prospect, for the cure of their *bodily* diseases; and yet under their spiritual maladies, how negligent are they to seek relief, though they enjoy the most efficacious means! Multitudes came and lay at the pool to be healed of their blindness, lameness and other infirmities; but of those, whose souls were perishing under guilt, how few applied to the Divine Physician! They who lay at these salutary waters, came to them with great sincerity—with real desires to be healed. This was their sole intention. There was not a dissembler among them. But of

those, who went to hear the Heavenly Preacher, many were influenced by the most unworthy motives. Their aim was not, to learn their duty by his instructions, to receive conviction from his reproofs, or to obtain salvation through his righteousness; but rather to eat of his loaves, or to ensnare him in his talk, or to gratify their vain curiosity.

Look into your own hearts—Do you find no such hypocrisy, or inconsistency there? If you are sick, you apply to the physician with an unfeigned desire of health; and his prescriptions you strictly observe. Is there the same sincerity in your prayers; and the same attention and obedience in hearing the word of salvation? Are your confessions of sin accompanied with penitence of heart, your petitions animated with inward desires, and your thanksgivings enlivened with real sentiments of gratitude? Do you hear the divine word, with a concern to understand it, with honesty to apply it, and with a resolution to be governed by it? If not; To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to God? He will not delight in them.

Great numbers of sick people were waiting at this pool, though it was only *at a certain season*, that any could receive a cure. But the fountain of divine grace is always open and easy of access. Thence may you draw water for your use in every time of need. They, with painful anxiety, waited for the distant, uncertain opportunity of applying the means of health. Will you, with unfeeling indifference, neglect the present, inviting, happy season for securing eternal life?

They had but a doubtful prospect of success; for only the first who stepped into the water, would be made whole: Yet, when so great an object, as their health, was depending, they thought it their wisdom to watch, seek and strive. How much more in a case of such infinite importance as yours

It is not your bodily health, or your mortal life, but your soul, which is now in danger. What would you be profited, if you should gain the world, and lose your soul? This is not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ. If you despise and trample on his blood, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. When your soul is lost, what will you give in exchange for it? Its redemption will cease forever, if there was only one in a multitude, who could be saved, you would have as much encouragement, as the people at Bethesda. But your hope stands on much better ground. This is the invitation of the gospel. "Ho, every one who thirsteth, come to the water."—"Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

In their case, success depended on being foremost. If, while one was going to the water, another stepped in before him, his labour was lost. But from this forwardness in others you have nothing to fear. You may suffer by your own negligence, but you will not be supplanted by their diligence. You may be too indolent; but they will not be too active. Their zeal will throw no obstruction in your way; it will rather assist your exertions, and facilitate your success. The fountain of divine grace, how many soever have washed in it, is still open and free; it is still pure and salutary. Go, as soon, and in as large a throng as you please. Go; there is room for you all—and room now. You need not wait for one another. Go, hand in hand; aid and encourage each other along. When the master sent forth his servant into the street to call into his house the poor, maimed, halt and blind; the servant, having done as he was commanded, returned, and said, "Yet there is room." Then said his Lord, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."

Among the people, which lay in the porches of Bethesda, there was one, whose case was peculiarly distressing. For thirty and eight years he had been afflicted with an obstinate infirmity. He was become intirely helpless. For some time past he had lain at the pool; but he could receive no benefit; for, poor man, he had no friend to assist him in the critical moment. While he was crawling toward the water, another stepped down before him. Physicians he had, doubtless, tried in vain. The pool was the last resort. Here, though often disappointed, still he waited with anxious wishes, but drooping hopes. Great were his discouragements: And great his patience.

Ye who feel your spiritual wants and infirmities, go, repair to God, and trust in his mercy. You are under no such discouragements. Watch at his gates; wait at the posts of his doors; continue instant in prayer. He has not said to you, Seek ye me in vain. If you find not immediate success, still hope and quietly wait for his salvation. You have need of patience, that after you have done his will, you may receive the promises. It is by faith and patience that you will inherit them. Let the desire of your souls be unto God, and to the remembrance of his name. With your souls desire him in the night, and with your spirit within you seek him early. He will keep those in peace, whose minds are stayed on him.

The advantage of constancy and fervency in prayer our Saviour has illustrated in two parables: The one concerning a man, who, though illiberal in his disposition, yet, by the importunity of a friend, was persuaded to rise at midnight and relieve his urgent necessities: The other concerning a judge, who, though he had not one principle of piety or justice in his heart, yet, by the repeated solicitations of a poor widow, was moved to redress the wrongs

which she suffered. Hence we are taught to conclude, that a God of infinite goodness and power will much more hear and answer his own elect, who cry to him day and night, though he should seem for a time to delay.

An example of perseverance under discouragements we have in the story of Bartimeus. This poor, blind man sat by the wayside, asking alms of travellers. Hearing a company pass along, and being informed that Jesus was among them, he cried, saying, "Jesus, have mercy on me." The Saviour went on his way, and seemed not to hear him. Some of the company rebuked the clamorous beggar, and charged him to hold his peace. But he cried the more a great deal; "Thou son of David, have mercy on me." Then Jesus stood and called him; attended to his case, and granted him relief.

Another example we have in the woman of Canaan. She cried to Jesus, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." But he answered her not a word. The disciples interceded in her behalf. "Send her away;" grant her request and dismiss her; "for she crieth after us;" cries with an earnestness that speaks distress. But he said, "I am not sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." To the Jews I am first sent: Why do you ask me to shew mercy to that gentile? One would have expected, the poor woman should now withdraw her petition. But she renewed it with greater importunity. She came and worshipped him, saying, "Lord, help me." Jesus then seemed to give her little less than a peremptory denial. "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs." Christ here alludes to the invidious distinction which the Jews made between themselves and the Gentiles; a dis-

tinction, which this woman, being conversant among the Jews, must often have heard. She humbly answers; "Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs, which fall from their masters' table." She confesses her unworthiness, and begs an inferiour place among the children, to eat the crumbs, which they throw away. Jesus now says, "O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt."

We may observe farther, how attentive these infirm people were to the particular seasons, which favoured their recovery. It is said, "They *waited* for the moving of the water." The impotent man says, "While I am going, another steppeth in before me." All were on the watch for the friendly moment; and all on the strife, who first should seize it.

Be ye, my friends, as attentive to the interest of your souls, as they were to the health of their bodies. "Behold, now is the accepted time: Behold, now is the day of salvation."

Life is the only season of probation. There is no work in the grave. The events of futurity are hidden from mortal sight. None knows what a day may bring forth. Know, in this your day, the things which belong to your peace.

There are some seasons peculiarly favourable to you—seasons when the spirit of grace strives with you, admonishes you of danger, and urges your escape—seasons when your hearts are awakened to an apprehension of the judgment to come, and affected with the vast concerns of religion. Watch these motions, as the impotent people watched the motion of waters; and embrace them with equal avidity. Neglect not present advantages under pretence of waiting for future excitations. Improve the former now; obey the latter whenever they oc-

cur.—"Seek the Lord, while he may be found; call upon him, while he is near.

"When Jesus saw the impotent man lie" in his helpless condition, "and knew that he had now been a long time in that case, he said unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?"

The length and greatness of this man's calamity, and the peculiar imbecility of his state, seem to have been the reasons, why Jesus made choice of him, as the subject on whom to display his healing power; while the rest were left under their infirmities.

The evangelists tell us, that "Christ healed all who came to him." They who made application to him in their own behalf, or in behalf of their friends, received the favour, which they asked. But the sick at Bethesda never applied to him at all. They were looking for relief from another quarter. They were not, therefore, such persons, as those, to whom he usually extended his healing mercy. Among them, however, there was one, whom he singled out from the multitude, and favoured with unsolicited health.

Analogous to this is the method of his grace in the salvation of sinners. Them who come to him he will in no wise cast out. Them who apply to him, with humble and penitent hearts, he will not reject. To obtain that grace which is necessary to repentance, awakened sinners must attend on the instituted means of religion. And it is usually, in an attendance on these means, that they are first brought to serious consideration. Particular instances, no doubt there are, in which God is found of them who sought him not. He sometimes, by his special providence, or powerful grace, arrests sinners, when they are in full pursuit of their guilty designs, and quite out of the way of ordinary means; as Jesus shewed mercy to the impotent man, who was looking for help only from the pool.

But this is not God's ordinary method. And for sinners to neglect the use of means, because, now and then, one has been suddenly and surprisingly awakened to conviction and repentance, is as absurd, as it would have been for the sick people in Jerusalem to expect a cure from Jesus without applying to him, because one impotent man at Bethesda had received this favour. In healing those who came to him, he acted as a faithful Saviour. In choosing this man from a number, he acted as a wise sovereign. He had mercy on whom he would have mercy. The man who was healed, had reason to admire this distinguishing goodness. They who were left under their infirmities had no cause to complain; for, though they saw the power of Christ in this remarkable instance, yet it does not appear, that they ever applied to him. This is his complaint of the unbelieving Jews; and this will be the condemnation of sinners under the gospel; "they would not come to him, that they might have life."

Christ says to the impotent man, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The man now opens his sorrowful case.—"Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am going another steppeth down before me."

Jesus puts the question, that the man, in the presence of the multitude, might declare the greatness and inveteracy of his disorder. Thus the miracle to be performed would become more conspicuous, and others, from his goodness and power, would be encouraged to seek relief. The mercy shewn to this poor man, was mercy offered to all in distress. If the impotent people, who saw the miracle, would not apply to the Saviour, well might they be left under the burden of their diseases.

It is observable, that, though Jesus made the first motion to the unhappy patient, yet he did not

actually heal him, till the man had humbly expressed his desire of health, and his inability to obtain it. In this manner, the Saviour usually dispenses his spiritual benefits. "Behold," says he, "I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me." To those who have not sought him, he applies himself in a way of exhortation and address: He calls them by his word, admonishes them by his providence, and awakens them by his spirit. These kind influential visits are granted previously to any promising and towardly dispositions in them. But before he actually bestows on them his saving mercy, they must see their guilt, feel their impotence, and repair to him as the only Saviour. They who are whole need not the physician; and they who think themselves to be whole, will not seek to the physician; but they who are sick. There are some, "who say, they are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not, that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." These despise the counsel of Christ, to "buy of him gold tried in the fire, that they may be rich; and white raiment, that they may be clothed, and to anoint their eyes with eyesalve, that they may see." The invitations and offers of the gospel, which are made to all indiscriminately, are often addressed, in a very particular manner, to the hungry and thirsty, the weary and heavy laden.

Jesus says to the man, "Arise, take up thy bed and walk."—"And immediately he was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked." This order was given, that, by the perfection and suddenness of the cure, the miracle might be rendered indubitable. It is added, "The same day was the sabbath." When the people, who on this day rested from their labours, should reprove the man

for carrying his bed, he would not fail to relate the mercy which he had experienced, and thus make it known to many besides the immediate spectators.

Christ's miracles in healing the sick, were designed to convince men of his heavenly mission, divine authority and saving power. And works of goodness, in particular instances, were acts of general benevolence. By these, as well as by the invitations and promises of his gospel, let all be encouraged to repair to him for relief in every distress, for succour in every temptation, and for deliverance from the wrath to come. To him let them commit their eternal interest, for he is able to save to the uttermost, and to keep that which is committed to him against the great day.

SERMON XXIV.

The awakened Jailor instructed in the way to Salvation.

ACTS xvi. 29, 30, 31.

Then he called for a light and sprang in, and came trembling and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, What must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.———

THESE two apostles were sent to preach the gospel in Philippi, a considerable city in Macedonia, which was inhabited chiefly by Romans, and is therefore called a *colony*.

Their doctrine soon gained such credit, that the superstitions of paganism yielded before it. Some principal men, who had long made gain from the ignorance and credulity of the common people, by employing servants to tell them strange things for money, alarmed at the mighty change effected by the preaching of the Apostles, seized them, brought them before the magistrates, accused them of making dangerous innovations, and procured them to be imprisoned. The jailor, having received a spe-

cial command to keep them safely, thrust them into the inmost apartment of the prison, and locked their feet fast in the stocks.

At midnight, while these holy prisoners sang praises to God, there was a violent earthquake, which rocked the foundations of the prison, burst open the doors, and loosed every prisoner from his bands.

The jailor, suddenly awakened, saw the doors standing open; and, concluding that the prisoners had fled, he drew his sword, and would have killed himself, to prevent the infamous punishment, which he apprehended. Paul, though it was now midnight, and he was in the inner prison, and the jailor without, yet perceiving his horrid design, called to him, and said, "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here." The Jailor now fully convinced, that these men were the servants of God, who taught the way of Salvation for guilty mortals, "called for a light, sprang in, came trembling, and fell down before the Apostles, and said, Sirs, What must I do to be saved?" To this important enquiry they gave a summary but pertinent answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

The manner in which the jailor made his enquiry —the enquiry itself—and the answer returned to it, shall be the subjects of our present meditations.

I. The *manner* in which the jailor made his enquiry deserves our attention.

He must be supposed, previous to this, to have had a general acquaintance with the leading truths of natural religion, such as the existence and government of a Deity, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retribution; for, without a belief of these truths, there would have been no room for his enquiry. Nor can we think, that he was altogether a stranger to the gospel. The apostles, before their imprisonment, had preached, for some

time, and with much success, in this city; and he had doubtless heard and learnt their doctrine, in its general design, though he had not yet embraced it. But what had just now taken place, roused him from his inattention, and impressed his mind with a strong conviction, that these men were teachers sent from God. And to them, in this important character, he applied for instruction in the things, which concerned his salvation.

And he applied to them *in haste*. He called for a light and *sprang* into the prison where they were.

With the careless part of mankind the great enquiry is, "Who will shew us any worldly good?" To them religious instructions and counsels are administered with little success. But the sinner, impressed with a conviction of his guilt, and awakened to a sense of his danger, views the salvation of his soul, as the one thing needful. Condemning his past stupidity, he resolves to seek first the kingdom of God. This is his great enquiry, "What must I do to be saved?"—His ears are open to the answer—he receives it with meekness, and applies it to practice.

The jailor came to the apostles *trembling*.

A conviction of sin, a sense of danger, and a pursuasion that these men were the servants of God, rushed with such power into his mind, that his whole frame was thrown into an unusual perturbation. Paul's conversion was preceded with a similar circumstance. When a light from the sky blazed around him, and a voice from heaven demanded the reason, and warned him of the danger of his conduct in persecuting the church, he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, What wilt thou have me to do?"

Conviction, in different sinners, is attended with different degrees of terror. It does not produce, in every one, such bodily agitation, as it produced

in Paul and the jailor. This was, in their case, principally owing to the extraordinary and surprising nature of the means by which they were brought to their new views and sentiments. But, in all sinners, conviction is attended with the same state of mind, as it was in them; a state of serious solicitude and fear.

The awakened sinner trembles within himself, to think what he has been doing—how he has rebelled against God, and insulted his supreme authority—how he has involved his soul in guilt, which the blood of sacrifices cannot expiate; and in pollutions, which soap and nitre cannot wash away. He is amazed at his past stupidity. There is nothing, except it be the mercy and patience of God, which more astonishes him, than that unaccountable security and indifference, with which, from year to year, he has proceeded in a course of sin, contrary to the light of reason, the rebukes of Providence, and the warnings of scripture. He wonders how it could be, that he should behold death destroying around him, and even within his walls—should see, on the one hand, a humble christian expire with calm and cheerful hopes; and, on the other, an impenitent sinner driven away in the terrors of conscious guilt; and yet never bring home the admonition, nor realize the different ends of the righteous and the wicked.

He trembles at his present danger; a danger, which till now, he never felt. He views himself as one standing on a precipice, while the ocean of divine wrath rolls beneath. He shudders, when he thinks, how long he has slept in this awful situation, and dreamed of safety.

He is astonished at the mercy which has made provision for guilty men—at the patience which has waited on him so long—and at the grace which has interposed to awaken him, and still indulges to him an opportunity of repentance.

He trembles to reflect, how many have been cut off before him, in a state of guilt and impenitence; some of them suddenly, and without special warning; and how justly this might have been his own sad case. He admires the goodness which has made him to differ. One thing which affected the jailor, was his marvellous preservation at a critical moment. He had pointed the sword to his own bosom, God's mercy arrested the stroke. Every awakened sinner sees, that he has destroyed himself, but in God is his help.

It is, with this trembling sense of sin and danger, and with trembling hopes of mercy, that he now makes the enquiry, what God will have him to do.

The jailor *fell down before the Apostles.*

Prostration was sometimes used as a token of religious adoration. But the jailor was too well acquainted with these men to think them entitled to divine honour. And if *they* had understood the action as thus intended, they, who always disclaimed all tokens of religious reverence, would have told him, as Peter did Cornelius, and as Paul and Barnabas did the Lycaonians in the like case, "We also are men." This action was therefore only a token of his respect to them, as teachers sent from God, and an expression of his humble disposition to receive and obey their heavenly instructions. With the same meek and teachable spirit should every man enquire after the way of salvation. "Lay apart all filthiness," says the Apostle, "and all superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. And be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your ownselves."

We proceed to consider,

II. The *matter* of the jailor's enquiry; "What must I do to be saved?"

His question implies an apprehension, that something was to be done by him to obtain the salvation, which the Apostles preached: Nor did they rebuke his question as improper; but returned an immediate answer, directing him, "to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." And then "they spake to him the word of the Lord," that he might know what he was to believe, and on what ground his faith was to rest.

From his question, and their manner of treating it, we learn, that something is to be done by the sinner, in order to his being saved.

But yet we are told, that men are saved by grace; and not of themselves—by the mercy of God; and not by the works of righteousness, which they have done.

There is then a sense in which their doings have no influence; and yet a sense in which they are of great importance in the affair of salvation.

It is necessary to state this matter clearly.

In the first place: If we consider salvation in reference to the *source* and *origin* of that divine scheme, on which it becomes obtainable, it is so absolutely and entirely of grace, as to exclude the influence of every thing else. No foreseen doings of ours could have any hand in moving or pursuading God to contrive and propose a way, in which we might be saved; but the plan originated wholly with himself. His wisdom contrived it, and his benevolence adopted it. We had no more hand in it, than we had in originating our own existence. In this view, the grace of God is the primary, moving cause of salvation, and nothing else is joined with it. The appointment of a Saviour to carry on this plan, was the effect of that grace, by which God is inclined to save sinners. The atonement of Jesus Christ was the consequence, not the cause, of God's mercy to our sinful race. "He so *loved* the world, as to

give his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." No works of ours, therefore, are to be performed under a notion of inclining God to be merciful, for he is merciful in his own nature.

Secondly. The *meritorious cause* and *moral reason*, why salvation is actually offered to, and bestowed upon sinful men, is the atonement of Jesus Christ, and this alone. "God has set forth his Son a propitiation, to declare his righteousness for the forgiveness of sin, that he might be just, and the justifier of them who believe." And this propitiation, not the worthiness of men, is that, for the sake of which pardon and eternal life are granted. Sinners, therefore, must do nothing with a view to *merit* salvation, to render themselves *worthy* of it, or to lay God's *justice* under an obligation to bestow it on them; "for other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, even the righteousness of Jesus Christ."

But then, thirdly, the *character*, or *qualification*, to which the promise of salvation is limited in the gospel, is something inherent in the subjects of it; and therefore something is to be done by sinners in order to obtain this character, or qualification. Though salvation is, through the grace of God, offered indiscriminately to all; and the righteousness of Jesus Christ, by the virtue of which it is purchased, is sufficiently meritorious for all; yet the actual bestowment of it is confined to persons of a particular description; namely, to them who repent and believe. All impenitent, unbelieving sinners, dying in this character, are by the gospel, expressly excluded from salvation; and will finally receive no more benefit from the grace of God, and the redemption of Christ, than if grace had never been revealed, or a Saviour had never been provided. Those on whom this blessing will ultimately be

conferred are only such as possess that faith, *which* implies a holy temper, and operates to a holy life. What therefore sinners have to do, is reference to their salvation, respects only their obtaining that faith, to which salvation is promised. And, in this view, their doings are of great importance.

It is God, who has proposed to us the *object*, and given to us the *means* of faith. That word, by the hearing of which faith comes, is the word of God. It is his *Spirit* also, which opens the heart to attend to, and receive the things which are spoken. Faith, therefore, is his gift. But then "we receive the Spirit in the hearing of the word;" not in the neglect of it. When the Apostles directed the jailor to believe in Jesus Christ, they, knowing that faith came by hearing, "spake the word of the Lord to him, and to all who were in his house." If it was necessary that they should speak the word to him, it was equally necessary that he should hear it.

So when Paul enquired, "Lord, What wilt thou have me do?" The Lord answered, "Go into the city, and it shall be told thee, what thou must do." Paul obeyed; and Ananias was sent to instruct him, and to baptise him for the remission of sins.

Cornelius, the Roman centurion, was commanded, by a heavenly messenger, to send for the Apostle Peter, "who would tell him words, by which he and his house should be saved." He obeyed the command, sent for the Apostle, and called together his friends to hear the words which should be spoken. Peter opened to them the gospel plan of salvation; and, "while he spake, the Holy Ghost fell on all them who heard the word." Thus "God gave to them repentance unto life."

But this leads us to consider,

III. The *answer* which the Apostles returned to the jailor's enquiry. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

He already believed, that there was one God, the ruler and judge of the world, to whom he was accountable for his conduct. Otherwise he would have felt no occasion for the enquiry. The Apostles, therefore, do not instruct him in the great principles of natural religion, as they ever did those, whom they found ignorant of them; but they pointed out to him a new object of faith, even the Lord Jesus Christ, who was ordained of God to be the Saviour of men. "They spoke to him the word of the Lord." They opened the plan, and stated the terms of salvation, and urged his compliance.

As Jesus Christ was sent of God to declare divine truths to men, and to execute the scheme of redemption, which divine wisdom had contrived, so he is proposed as the immediate object of faith. "We *by him* do believe in God."

Faith in Christ implies a rational assent to this truth, that he is a teacher and Saviour ordained of God for men; and consequently a belief of all that he has commanded and taught. Thus faith is often described in the gospel. This was the faith of the disciples.—"We believe, and are sure, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." This was Martha's faith.—"Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world." This was the faith of the Ethiopian officer.—"I believe that Christ is the Son of God." Faith is sometimes expressed by different, but equivalent phrases; as a belief that "God raised Jesus from the dead"—"that God sent him into the world."—"that he is a teacher come from God."

This assent must be the result of rational conviction. We are no more to believe without evidence, than to disbelieve against evidence. The latter is obstinacy; the former is rashness. The christian must be ready to give to every one a *reason* of the

hope which is in him. The miracles of Christ were performed in the presence of his disciples, "that they might believe in him, and that believing they might have life through his name." When he had given Thomas full proof of his resurrection he said to him, "Be not faithless, but believing."

Now if we believe, on good evidence, that Jesus is the Son of God, and a teacher sent by him, we must believe all his doctrines and precepts, promises and threatenings, and whatsoever he has taught either by his own mouth, or the mouth of his Apostles; for, being a divine teacher, he would only bear witness to the truth; and he would not employ his divine power in supporting the credit of his apostles, if they had deviated from his instructions. When, therefore, Paul and Silas required the jailor to believe in Christ, they required him to believe the whole compass of the christian revelation, as far as it had been opened to him, and to receive such additional instructions as should, on the same authority, be afterward communicated.

But then the faith, to which the promise of salvation is annexed, is not a cold assent of the mind to the general truth of the gospel, and to the particular doctrines contained in it; but such a belief as includes correspondent exercises and motions of heart. It is believing with the heart, and receiving the love of the truth. The word of God is said "effectually to work in them who believe."

Our belief of Christ's divine authority must be accompanied with reverence and submission. Our belief of his holy and perfect character must be attended with love and delight. Our belief of the great things which he has done and suffered for us, must operate in a way of gratitude and joy. Our belief of his meritorious atonement and prevalent intercession must lead us to trust in God through him, and to do all things in his name. Our belief

of his sinless and amiable example must induce us to walk as he walked. So that faith, taken in its just latitude and extent, is nothing less than a subjection of soul to the whole gospel of Christ. It is an unreserved dedication of ourselves to his service, and a humble reliance on him for righteousness and strength.

If any now enquire, what they must do to be saved, here is the answer—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved."

You will say, you believe the gospel to be true. Very well; but if you believe it to be true, see that your hearts and lives are conformed to it; and that you act under its influence. You believe that Jesus is the Christ. But have you seen your own sinfulness, the justice of the law which condemns you, and your incapacity to rescue yourselves from its awful sentence?—Is Christ precious to you?—Have you committed your souls to him to be sanctified by his spirit, and saved by his righteousness?—Have you chosen his service, and do you walk in imitation of his life, and in reliance on his grace? By such enquiries judge, whether you have believed to the saving, or only to the deceiving of your souls.

Whatever exercises of mind you have felt—whatever duties you have done—whatever means you have attended; rest in nothing short of repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. These are the terms of salvation.

If you ask, how you shall obtain this faith; the Apostle says, "faith comes by hearing." Hear the word of God with diligent attention, and give earnest heed to the things which you hear, lest, at any time, you should let them slip.

You will say, "the word avails nothing without the Spirit." But remember, "God gives the Spirit in the hearing of faith. Pray always that he would fulfil in you the work of faith with power."

"Quench not the Spirit." Abstain from those things, which tend to extinguish his kindly influences. Give entertainment to the serious and rational convictions excited in your minds. Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.

Some will ask perhaps, Whether they can expect success in such a use of means, as any are capable of in their unregenerate state?—We cannot promise men success on any thing short of a sincere compliance with the gospel. We aim, however, to address them according to the different characters in which they appear. We would instruct the ignorant, alarm the thoughtless, undeceive the self-confident, and encourage the desponding, and thus be made all things to all men, that we may by all means save some. We would place duty before all men, and urge it by gospel motives. We would shew them the impossibility of obtaining salvation by strict law; open the plan of grace, and press their compliance with it. When we hear them speaking, and see them acting discreetly—when we observe in them an attention to their religious advantages, and an engagedness in the work of their salvation, we hope they are not far from the kingdom of God. We hope, the good work begun will be accomplished. But we exhort them to look to themselves, that they lose not the things which they have gained. And we solemnly warn them, that if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them, than the beginning.

SERMON XXV.

Micah's Confidence and Disappointment in his Priest.

JUDGES xvii. 13.

Then said Micah, Now I know that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.

GOD instituted, for the church of Israel, a form of worship adapted to their circumstances, and to that age of the world. Its peculiar ordinances were designed to guard them against the superstitions of the heathens, and to preserve them from disunion among themselves.

Before the temple at Jerusalem was built, God appointed, that his tabernacle should be placed in Shiloh, and that the tribes should there assemble, at the great festivals instituted in the law.

To perform the common service of the tabernacle the tribe of Levi was separated; and from this tribe the family of Aaron was selected for the peculiar duties of the priesthood; such as offering sacrifice, burning incense, expounding the law, and enquiring at the oracle.

The continued enjoyment of God's favour depended on a faithful adherence to his institutions.

The Jews, though fully instructed in the true and acceptable worship of God, soon began to corrupt it by human inventions. Instead of assembling at the place where God had recorded his name, they chose other places of worship according to their own humour. Instead of attending on the ministrations of the orderly priests, who were set apart and educated for their office, they made priests of the lowest of the people. Instead of directing their adorations to the one Supreme God, they worshipped the heathen deities, which were but creatures of imagination, or senseless idols formed by art and man's device.

The first successful attempt to introduce idolatry into the church of Israel, is related in the chapter where our text is, and in the next following. Previous attempts, indeed, had been made; but those, being open and publick, gave an alarm, and were immediately opposed. This was made more privately, and in a time of political confusion, when there was no king—no settled government, in Israel; and therefore it met with no effectual opposition.

The idolatry, which finally proved the ruin of the Jews, began in the house of Micah; was here carried on by a vagrant Levite; from hence it was transferred to the tribe of Dan; and there it continued, until the ark of God was taken by the Philistines, and the tabernacle removed from Shiloh. After this, it was for a time suppressed; but in the reign of Jeroboam, it was again revived, and was never wholly and finally extirpated until the Babylonian captivity.

This Micah was of Mount Ephraim. He lived in the same house with his mother, who probably was a widow. She had, by some means, collected a

quantity of silver, which Micah stole from her. Vexed at her loss, she uttered such dreadful imprecations as frightened him into a confession of the theft, and restitution of the silver.

The fond mother now blesses her son, and says, "This silver I had wholly dedicated to the Lord, to JEHOVAH, for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image." She did not intend to renounce the God of Israel; but to worship him by an image, which she considered as having the divine presence residing in it. This, though not the grossest kind of idolatry, yet was an impious degradation of the glory, and a vile corruption of the worship of that infinite and invisible Spirit, of whom there can be no corporeal similitude. And it naturally led to still more gross superstition. When men begin to depart from God, they can prescribe to themselves no bounds. They know not how far they shall wander, where they shall make a stand, nor how they shall return. God has instituted the order of his house. If forsaking this, we follow our own inventions, we shall soon fall under the power of a wild imagination, and become subject to the influence of infernal artifice; and there is but a precarious hope, that we shall recover ourselves out of the snare.

Micah agreed to his mother's proposal. The silver was given to an artificer, who made thereof a molten, and a graven image. These Micah placed in his house. He then made an *ephod* in imitation of the pontifical vestments, and *teraphim* in resemblance of the urim and thummim; and he consecrated one of his sons for a family priest. Well pleased, no doubt, he was with this fine device. He had not renounced the God of Israel: He had only contrived to pay him an easy service. He should be excused from the trouble of going to Shiloh, and attending at the tabernacle, for he had

gods and a priest in his house. It appears, from the next chapter; that his neighbours were drawn into the same superstition; and neglecting the instituted worship of the sanctuary, they attended on the ministrations of this new fangled priest.

Some time after this, a young man, who, by his father's side, was a Levite, wandering about for employment, or perhaps for an easier subsistence, came to the house of Micah. In those days of anarchy, the Levites were probably neglected; and this youth, quitting the service of the tabernacle, travelled the country in quest of a better livelihood.

Micah enquired, who and whence he was; and, learning that he was a Levite, he invited him to officiate in his house, as a priest. For this service he promised him food and raiment, and ten shekels of silver by the year. "And the Levite was *content* to dwell with the man, and he became unto him as one of his sons; and Micah consecrated the Levite, who became his priest."—"Now," says he, "I *know* that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a *Levite* to my priest."

This Levite however, had no better right to the priesthood than Micah's son; for by divine institution, this office was confined to Aaron's family. It was an impious presumption in Micah to attempt the consecration of a priest, and in the Levite to accept it from his hands. This service belonged not to every man; but was assigned to the priests themselves. And indeed, if the Levite had been of the priestly order, and regularly consecrated, he was still grossly impious in favouring Micah's superstition, and in encouraging his separation from the appointed place, and instituted form of divine worship.

But his motive was to obtain a subsistence. Little encouragement had he hitherto found in his excursions. A maintenance is now offered. Rather

than forego the advantage, he will alter his religion, and comply with the humour of the man, on whom he is dependent.

Of the same complexion were Jeroboam's priests. When the king erected his golden calves in Dan and Bethel, the orderly priests and Levites forsook him. They refused to assist in his idolatrous worship. He, therefore, made priests of the lowest of the people, who, being in needy circumstances, readily accepted the appointment, to secure for themselves a subsistence.

These idolatrous priests, and the false prophets who acted in concert with them, and the rulers who patronized them, are the men so often condemned, in the writings of the prophets, as devoted to worldly gain. "The heads judge for reward, and the priests teach for hire, and the prophets divine for money." The regular, standing priests are not the persons here intended; for they had no occasion to teach for hire: A stated provision was by the devine law made for them. But the idolatrous priests, who went about to make divisions in God's church, and to corrupt men from the purity of his worship, *these* "taught for hire." "They loved gifts, followed after rewards, and cried, *Give ye.*"—"They looked to their way, every one for his gain from his quarter."—They were blind watchmen; shepherds who could not understand; they rejected knowledge, and forgot the law."—"They ate up the sins, and set their hearts on the iniquities of the people." They lived on the sin offerings of the people; and took pleasure in their transgressions, because the more transgressions among the people, the more sin offerings for the priests to consume. Therefore God says, "He would reject them from being priests"—would disown them in their assumed, but prostituted character.

They, who, according to God's institution, ministered at the altar, had a right to partake of the altar. And so still, they who preach the gospel, have a right to live of the gospel. But the man who desires to be put into the priest's office, only that he may get a piece of silver, and eat a morsel of bread, is unworthy of the trust; "for, for a piece of bread, that man will transgress." On the same motive, on which he accepted, he will profane, or desert his office.

This Levite was a transient person; he came from a distance; he had nothing, but his own word, to recommend him. Micah took him into his service, with hasty and implicit confidence, and without proper information; and no wonder if he was deceived.

"I know," says he, "that the Lord will do me good, because I have a Levite to my priest." Poor, deluded man! If Aaron or Samuel had been his priest, he was not to hope that the Lord would do him good, unless he attended to his own duty. "Let no man glory in man," says the apostle; "for, Who is Paul, or who is Apollos, but ministers, by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?"

Some promise themselves much good, because they worship God in such a place, and hear such kind of preaching: But they should remember, that all things are of God: that the best ministers are instruments in his hands; that God will then do them good, when they strictly conform to his institutions, humbly rely on his grace, and seek his blessing in the way which he has appointed.

Had Micah considered, that he had forsaken God's tabernacle—had corrupted the purity of divine worship—had chosen for his priest a man unauthorised and unrecommended—had taken him implicitly, and consecrated him presumptuously, he must have seen, that God would not do him good

at all the more for his having this man to his priest. If we are dependent on God for the good which we desire, we must seek it of him in the manner which he prescribes.

Let us pursue our story a little farther, that we may learn how far Micah's expectations were answered.

The tribe of Danites, being straitened in their inheritance, sent five men to explore the country for a new plantation. These messengers, in their journey, came to Mount Ephraim, and, lodging near Micah's house, they heard the voice of the young Levite; probably as he was performing religious service; and they immediately recollected him; for as he had lived a vagrant life, they, perhaps, had heard him hold forth before. They turned in to see him; and, finding, that he had commenced a priest, was dressed in the pontifical robes, and furnished with images and teraphim, they informed him of the object of their expedition, and desired him to enquire of God concerning their success. Lost to all sense of piety, he, after a formal pretence of consulting the oracle, answered, "Go in peace; before the Lord is your way." As he had assumed the office and habiliments of the priesthood, he would decline no part of the sacred function, lest he should baulk his employers, and lose credit with his patron.

High pretensions to divine intercourse, to visions, illuminations, supernatural discoveries, and heavenly directions, are common with impostors: Thus they deceive the hearts of the simple, beguile unstable souls, and draw away disciples after them.

One sinner destroys much good, and more in proportion to the publicity of the character in which he acts. This dishonest Levite, officiating as an idolatrous priest, corrupted the religion of all around

him. He collected a considerable number of people in the vicinity to attend on his ministry. Some it is probable, were captivated by the novelty of his ceremonies—some might be pleased with the idea of having a priest so near them—some perhaps admired his great sanctity and indifference to the world; for he had only his victuals and clothes, and ten shekels by the year; and Micah paid him all this—And he might also have some popular talents: He seems to have had a strong and vehement utterance, and a peculiar tone of voice. For the Danites heard and recognised him as they passed along in the street. It is said, "They knew his voice."

These adventurers, having searched the land whither they were sent, returned with a favourable account, which encouraged the tribe to begin a plantation there. For this purpose, there were raised six hundred men in arms, who, conducted by the five spies, marched through the village, where Micah lived; and, being informed of the silver images, and other religious utensils in his house, they concerted a scheme to rob it. The armed men, drawn up at the gate, sent in the five spies, who, being considered as friends, were received without suspicion. They immediately took the images, ephod and teraphim, and carried them out to their brethren at the gate. The priest, surprised at the freedom of his old friends, began to expostulate. But they soon satisfied him. "Hold thy peace;" say they, "lay thy hand on thy mouth; go with us, and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man; or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and family in Israel?"—"And the priest's heart was glad: He took the ephod, teraphim and images, and went away in the midst of the people."

This is that priest, for whose sake, Micah *knew*, the Lord would do him good!

When the Young man was wandering about for a subsistence, he thought a little would suffice him. His food and raiment, with a few shekels for contingencies, he esteemed a decent provision; and at first "he was content." But when he found that he grew more important, he began to aspire after greater things. To be a priest in a small village, on a moderate maintenance, and for this to be dependent on a single man, was now too humiliating. As soon as he heard the proposal of an advantageous translation, "his heart was glad." He accepted the offer without hesitation; and into his own hallowed hands he received the sacred images, which had been violently taken out of Micah's chapel, and bare them triumphantly away in the midst of the armed ruffians.

These Danites soon built a city on their new plantation; here they set up their stolen images; this Levite became their priest, and his sons succeeded him.

In vain Micah collected his neighbours, and pursues the robbers. In vain he exclaims, "Ye have taken away my gods and the priest; and, What have I more?" They answered, "Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest [illegible]ry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life."—"When he saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house." And glad he was to escape so.

What thinks Micah now of his vagrant priest?—As heavenly and disinterested as he was, he could leave his small charge for a more lucrative settlement.

Perhaps he thought, that his abilities were here too much confined, and that his labours would be more useful in a larger sphere. But could he, on this principle, be justified in joining to rob his patron's chapel.

Though he professed to enjoy a heavenly intercourse, and to receive divine responses, yet, in this case, he never asked counsel of God or man. The call was clear—there was no room to deliberate—a richer living presented itself, and his former contract was at end.

Micah must, by this time be ashamed of his rash confidence in a stranger.

Leaving him now to his own reflections, we will animadvert, a moment, on these Danites.

Being about to form a new settlement, they determined to have some kind of religious worship among them. Whether it was rational, or idolatrous—instituted by God, or invented by man, they were not solicitous; but some form or other they would have.

They seem to have been but an ignorant collection. They probably had neglected the stated worship of God in Shiloh, and hence were more easily seduced to idolatry. None are so liable to error and delusion, as they who despise the orders of God's house. Among these you will always see impostors the most busy and the most successful. They seldom practise their arts on those, who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. That christians may hold fast their profession without wavering, the Apostle advises, that they forsake not the assembling of themselves together.

These Danites, in their zeal for religion, robbed Micah's chapel, and seduced his chaplain; and, when he complained of the wrong, they threatened his life. Did they think, that God was pleased only with external forms—that he had no regard to justice, truth and mercy?—We condemn their conduct. But is there nothing like it to be seen among christians?—If we tear in pieces one church

in order to build up another—if we cause divisions and separations in one religious society in order to collect out of it another of our own complexion and denomination, when, at the same time, we profess substantially to agree in doctrine and practice with the society, which we thus disturb; we act precisely in the spirit of these Danites, who robbed Micah's chapel, that they might furnish their own; stole his image, that they might worship it themselves, and enticed away his priest, that they might enjoy his ministrations.

Religion is a matter of most serious importance, and we are to act in it with engagedness and zeal. But it is a reasonable, selfconsistent service, and our zeal must be honest and peaceable. We may no more lie to make God's truth and glory abound, than to make our own wealth and honour abound. He hates robbery, as much for an offering on his altar, as for an offering at the shrine of ambition and avarice. If fraud and artifice, duplicity and injustice are criminal in their nature, we cannot change their nature by applying them to a godly design.

The substance of religion consists in righteousness, mercy, truth and the love of God. To promote these, is the proper use of all instituted forms of worship. If we maintain our favorite forms at the expense of real virtues, we invert the order of things; our devotion becomes superstition, and our religious worship resembles the idolatry of the Danites.

We see, in the case before us, the importance of a strict adherence to the order of God's house. When once we depart from this, we know not how far we shall run, nor how many we shall draw along with us.

Let us only consider, how idolatry began and spread in the land of Israel. It was first suggested

by a woman to her son. He set it up in his own house, and withdrew from the tabernacle of God. After a while he called in a straggling Levite and consecrated him for a priest. By the influence of this unprincipled Levite the families in the vicinity were corrupted. By and by the man carried his idols and superstition into the tribe of Dan. There they continued for a number of years, even all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh. After idolatry seemed to be suppressed, there was still in this tribe, an inclination to favour it. When Jeroboam set up his golden calves, he placed one in Dan, as the tribe which would most readily receive it. Dan, in allusion to the old serpent, who brought sin into the world, is called "a serpent in the way, and an adder in the path, which biteth the horse's heels, so that his rider falleth backward." This revolt proved the ruin of the nation. No warnings of the prophets, or judgments of heaven would reclaim them, until they were given up to a captivity of seventy years.

As the tribe of Dan had the principal influence in the introduction and support of idolatry in the earthly Canaan, so when the hundred and forty and four thousand were sealed out of the tribes of Israel, as heirs of the heavenly Canaan, this tribe was utterly excluded.

Who would have expected such lasting and extensive mischief from an error, which began in a private family, and was suggested by an obscure woman?

Important is the Apostle's caution to the Hebrews —"Look diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled."

Never let us venture to violate the plain institutions of God, nor to substitute in their place the inventions of men. We are only then to hope for his blessing, when we seek it in the way of his ap-

pointment. If we attempt innovations in the order of his house, the guilt begins with us, but the mischief may spread wide, and last long. It is dangerous to make new experiments in religion.

We find ourselves, perhaps, agreeably entertained, and think we are greatly edified, by attending on some new and transient preacher, who assumes a new name, exhibits some new forms, and appears chiefly on days which God has not sequestered for his worship. But let us not mistake the mere emotions of passion for godly edification. The novelty of the scene may move us for a time, but when the scene is familiarized, the emotion will subside.

We are never to look for spiritual advantage in a departure from God's appointments.

When our hearts are formed to the love of holiness, and our lives are filled with good works, then may we conclude, that we are really edified: And this edification comes by attendanee on God's institutions. Christ has given pastors and teachers for the perfecting of his saints, and the edifying of his church. And it is by attending on their ministry, that we make increase to the edifying of ourselves in love. If we disturb the peace, and break the unity of his church, in order to our personal edification, we mistake the means, and shall miss of the end. Christians are a mutual comfort, when they are fellow workers to the kingdom of God; therefore study the things which make for peace, and the things wherewith you may edify one another.

SERMON XXVI.

Premature Judging forbidden.

1 CORINTHIANS iv. 5.

——Judge nothing before the time, till the Lord come.

FROM the connexion in which these words stand, it is evident, that the Apostle has reference to our judging other men's spiritual condition.

He wishes, that he may stand well in the charity of the Corinthians, as a faithful steward of the mysteries of God; but he desires them not to judge peremptorily in his case, or in any case of the like nature. For a man's sincerity is a matter of such secrecy and importance, that he should be cautions and diffident in judging even himself. But Christ will come to judgment; and then shall every man, who has been faithful, have praise of him. Therefore, says he, "judge nothing before the time, till the Lord come."

The Apostle here teaches us, that all pretensions to a certain knowledge of other men's sincerity in religion, are rash and unwarrantable.

An observation or two will be necessary to a clear statement of this doctrine.

I would observe, first, that we are in some cases more competent judges of the *wickedness*, than in any case, we are, of the *goodness* of men's hearts.

The open, customary practice of any vice is a decisive evidence of inward reigning corruption. Particular *acts* of sin are incident to good men. But the habitual *indulgence* of sin is characteristic of the wicked only. "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after." When Simon the sorcerer proposed to purchase with money the miraculous gifts of the holy Ghost, that he might make gain by trafficking in them, it was no rashness in Peter to say, "I *perceive* that thou art in the bond of iniquity." This was a plain case; and there may be other cases as plain.

But then, on the other hand, we cannot with equal certainty pronounce any man to be holy; for worldly motives may operate on corrupt hearts to produce the external *appearance* of holiness. Hence we are more capable of judging some men to be *sinners*, than we are of judging any men to be *saints*.

I would observe, secondly, That though we cannot absolutely determine any man's godly sincerity, yet we may form such a charitable judgment concerning our fellow christians, as is sufficient to religious communion.

We may have different degrees of evidence in favour of different persons, arising from their different attainments, or from our different acquaintance with them. But our judgment must always incline to the favourable side. We are to condemn no man as a sinner, till we have positive evidence, that he is such. We are to hope every man a saint, till we have conclusive evidence, that he is not such.

It is always safer to err on the candid, than on the censorious part. If there be a good profession, and nothing to contradict that profession, we have no warrant to condemn men as sinners, or exclude them from our charitable hopes.

Having stated the doctrine in the text, we shall now adduce our arguments in support of it.

1. The knowledge of men's hearts is *God's prerogative.*

This God assumes to himself. "I the Lord search the hearts; I try the reins of the children of men"—"All the churches shall know, that I am he, who search the reins and the heart." This Solomon ascribes to him exclusively of all others. "Thou, even thou *only* knowest the hearts of all the children of men." It is on this ground, that the Apostle cautions us not to judge any thing before the time. "The Lord will come, and bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart." Since the scripture acknowledges the judgment of the heart as belonging exclusively to God; for us to assume it, is to invade his throne.

2. It is no easy matter for men to know *their own* hearts.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" There are in the human heart so many delusive appearances, which flatter its natural vanity—so many evil dispositions, which lie dormant, till a suitable temptation calls them into action—so many unworthy motives, which work insensibly—so many arts of selfimposition, that "he who hastily trusts his own heart, is a fool." The Apostle says, "I judge not my own self; for though I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified, for he that judgeth me, is the Lord."

We are cautioned not to deceive ourselves, nor to be deceived. We are exhorted to fear, lest we

seem to come short of the promised rest—to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith—to give diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end. We are warned, that there is such a case, as a man's seeming to himself to be something, when he is nothing; and seeming to be religious, when all his religion is vain. Impressed with a sense of the deceitfulness of the heart, David prays, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." "Search me, O God, and know my heart, prove me and know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

If there be need of so much examination, watchfulness, diligence, experience and observation, in order to form a satisfactory judgment of our own character, how shall we know the sincerity of others? We can look into our own hearts directly. Into the hearts of others we can look only circuitously.

This leads me to say,

3. We can judge the hearts of others only by *external* indications.

James says, "I will shew my faith by my works." In conversing with a friend we may be much pleased with his doctrinal knowledge, religious sentiments, and professed experience of the power of godliness, and may entertain a very favorable opinion of his character. His profession however, is but external evidence. It gives us hope of his piety; but it can go no further. We know not, but he aims to deceive us, or may be deceived himself.

Such works as are the proper fruits of faith are more solid evidence; for in these there is less room for dissimulation. But we may misjudge even here; for it is but a small part of any man's life, which falls under our observation. The more secret, which are the more numerous parts of it, escape our notice. We may see many good actions

done by him; but we see not the motives, tempers and ends which govern him. After all that we hear him say, or see him do, we can form only a charitable opinion of his real character.

4. The scripture gives us many *instances* of the *uncertainty* of human judgment in the matter under consideration. I shall mention only two; one to shew that christians of distinguished character have had great confidence in a very bad man; the other to shew, that such christians have had great diffidence of a very good man.

Judas, who was one of Christ's twelve disciples, was in high estimation among his brethren. He was sent forth with them to preach the kingdom of God and to work miracles. By his fair appearance and agreeable behaviour, he obtained a great share in their confidence. They made him their steward and almoner. When a woman poured ointment on Christ's head, Judas complained, "Why was this waste? The ointment might better have been sold and the money given to the poor." Such was his address, that he raised against the woman a spirit of indignation in his brethren. When Christ warned his disciples that one of them would betray him; they asked each one for himself, "Lord is it I?" Not one of them suspected Judas. Yet this Judas was a dissembler, a thief, a traitor, a son of perdition, and he is gone to his place.

Let us consider the other instance.

Paul was, for some time, a violent persecutor of the church of Christ. On the road from Jerusalem to Damascus, whither he was going with a bloody commission, he was by divine power, wonderfully, changed in his temper and views, and completely brought over to the faith of the gospel. Soon he commenced a zealous preacher of the faith, which he once destroyed. Having preached for a time in Damascus, he returned to Jerusalem, and assayed to

join himself to the disciples, who were there. But they could not "fellowship" him. "They were all afraid of him. They believed not that he was a disciple." Then Barnabas took him, and brought him to the Apostles, and *declared* to them, how he had seen Christ in the way, and had boldy preached in Christ's name; and on this testimony he was received by the Apostles, and consequently by all the disciples.

Now if all the immediate disciples of Jesus could be deceived by the hypocrisy of Judas; and if none of the first believers in Jerusalem could discern the sincerity of Paul, what arrogance must it be in us to assume the bold pretension of ascertaining by intuition or sympathy the existence of grace in other men's hearts? Wise is the caution given in the text, "Judge nothing before the time."

Our subject will suggest to us some useful *remarks.*

1. The spirit and temper of the primitive disciples afford a substantial evidence of the truth of our religion.

They were not credulous, but cautious—not hasty in their judgment, but deliberate in their enquiries. They would not receive such a man as Paul without good testimony in his favour. They were careful not to be imposed upon by false teachers. They tried them who said, They were Apostles, and rejected them whom they found liars. They would not hear a preacher, before they had competent evidence of his authority to preach. Nor would they receive an epistle as coming from an Apostle, till they had proof of its genuineness. Hence Paul to all his epistles subjoined a signature which could not be counterfeited. By their caution the gospel comes to us with an evidence, which cannot be gainsayed.

2. Worthy of our imitation is the prudence of the early christians in regard to those, whom they received as teachers of religion.

In admitting members into the church, they were liberal and candid. They required no long course of probation, nor particular detail of religious experiences, but only a professed belief of, and subjection to the gospel of Christ. Such as became members of the church, were immediately subject to her discipline, and this, though tender and kind, was vigilant and strict.

But in receiving publick teachers, they acted with great caution. They required, not only a present personal profession, but a testimony from others of previous good conduct. Paul's account of himself could not satisfy the disciples at Jerusalem. He must go to the Apostles, to the known ministers of Christ, and from them obtain approbation. And *they* would not admit him to their ministerial fellowship, till they had obtained in his favour a testimony from Barnabas, who was one of their brethren, and who had personal knowledge of Paul's conversion and subsequent conduct.

The primitive christians exercised a much stricter caution in admitting men to officiate in the ministry, than in admitting private members to commune in the church. They considered every one as having a right to enjoy christian privileges, unless the church could prove his disqualification. But they considered no man as having a right to exercise the *office* of a *teacher* in the church, unless he could exhibit positive proof of his qualification. Here the burden of proof lay on the candidate.

But there are some now, who would invert this order. Before one is admitted into the church, they think there ought to be a course of trial, and positive, unequivocal proof of inward grace. But these same persons will run to hear a man preach, who is

an utter stranger to them, in whose favour they have no testimony, and of whom they know not whether he has inward grace, or even external morality. This is departing from the order of the gospel. "Christ's sheep follow not strangers, for they know not the voice of strangers."

3. The sentiment entertained by some, that there is in true christians a kind of sympathy or fellowship, by which they infallibly know one another, appears to be irrational and unscriptural.

They cannot *infallibly* know one another by any means; and what knowledge they have arises, not from a secret intercourse of spirits, but from visible works. If christians possessed this inward discernment, how came the disciples at Jerusalem to be afraid of Paul? What need was there that Paul should recommend Phebe to the Romans, or Timothy to the Corinthians, or Tychicus to the Ephesians, or Onesimus to the Colossians? What need was there that Barnabas should recommend Paul, or that John should recommend Demetrius, or that Peter should recommend Sylvanus?

True christians, no doubt, have fellowship with one another. They have fellowship, as they are joint partakers of the same spiritual things; have a common interest in the same rich blessings; possess the same holy tempers; are sanctified by the same divine spirit; believe the same sacred gospel; are subject to the same supreme Lord; are heirs of the same heavenly inheritance. And they also have fellowship, as there is a mutual love subsisting between them, and a mutual agreeableness in their tempers and manners, so that they esteem each other's character, and delight in each other's company. But, then, that love which one christian has for another is not a blind, enthusiastic passion; it is a rational affection arising from a previous opinion

of him as a christian. In order to our loving another, as a christian, it is not necessary, that we should *know* him to be such; it is sufficient, that he appears to us in that character.

Love to the brethren is the same thing, as a love of truth and holiness. "We love the brethren for the truth's sake." "And hereby we know, that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments." "We know, that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren." *Our* loving the brethren is an evidence, not that *they*, but that *we* have passed from death to life.

A christian may exercise true christian love toward hypocrites, while they appear to him as christians; and may not have fellowship with real christians, if he mistakes their character. The disciples had fellowship with Judas, while he followed Christ and preached in his name. They had no fellowship with Paul, while they were afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

If a mutual agreeableness between two persons were an evidence, that both were real christians, two amorous lovers, or two vicious companions might thus prove, that *they* were both real christians. It is not our loving another, but our loving that virtue, which appears in another, that may be called love to the brethren as such, and that proves our having passed from death to life.

4. It is dangerous *hastily* to pronounce men in a converted state. This is judging before the time. As we cannot know others *infallibly*, so neither can we form a probable judgment of them *speedily*.

There may be transient convictions, and temporary reformations, without a radical change of heart. The permanence of its fruits is the best evidence of the reality of the change. "They who continue in

Christ's word are his disciples indeed." To obtain this evidence there must be time. We are to hope, where we see ground of hope. But to pronounce men in a state of safety, because we see a present favourable alteration, is to flatter delusion, feed spiritual pride, strengthen hypocrisy, and hinder conversion.

It is still worse to call men converts, when they are not at all altered for the better. Conversion makes a spiritual change in the heart, and a moral change in the life, where the life has been immoral. If then we judge and pronounce men converted, only because they pretend to some new feelings which they never had before, or because they discover a zeal for some new opinions, which they never thought of before, or because they have joined themselves to a new sect which they never followed before; when they are not at all more meek, humble, peaceable, benevolent, or sober than they were before, we take a rash and dangerous method to make converts. Such converts as these will not stand the trial, when the Lord shall come.

5. We cannot be sure of forming a pure church on earth.

Every christian, and every church ought to aim at purity; yea, at perfection. The christian must indulge no known sin, but cleanse himself from all filthiness. The church must countenance no visible transgressor, but either reclaim, or put away the wicked person. But the idea of excluding from the church *all* hypocrites and *all* unsound professors, is irrational, because it is judging before the time.

Christ directs, that we invite all to come into his church; and that we invite them to come with faith, repentance and sincere resolutions of obedience. We must warn them against presumption and hypocrisy. If they manifest the wicked-

ness of their hearts by visible immorality, we must labour for their amendment, and ultimately exclude the irreclaimable. But to exclude them, because they give not certain evidence of their sincerity, is arbitrary and unjust; for such evidence can no man give, and no church receive.

Let us then judge nothing before the time, but labour that we ourselves may be accepted, when the Lord shall come. The difficulty of knowing our own hearts, should teach us humility, excite us to watchfulness over ourselves, and urge us to frequent, serious and prayerful examination.

"The kingdom of God is like a net cast into the sea, which gathered of every kind; and when it was full they drew it to the shore, and gathered the good into vessels, and cast the bad away. So shall it be in the end of the world. Then the wicked shall be severed from among the just, and cast into a furnace of fire." Let us therefore judge ourselves, that we may not be condemned with the impenitent and guilty world.

SERMON XXVII.

The Excellence of the Scriptures.

ACTS vii. 38.

——*Who received the lively Oracles to give unto us:*

STEPHEN, in his defence before the Jewish council, gives a compendious history of God's dealings toward the seed of Abraham, from the days of that patriarch to the time of Solomon. From this history he proves, that Jesus of Nazareth, who had been rejected and crucified by the Jews, was the prophet, who, as Moses foretold, was to be raised up in that nation to instruct them in the will of God. He says, Moses in his day declared to the children of Israel, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear." "This" Moses "is he who was in the church in the wilderness, and with the angel who spake to him in mount Sinai, and to our fathers, who received the lively oracles to give unto us."

Moses, by the ministration of angels, received from God his lively oracles for the benefit, not only of the then present generation, but of their succes-

sors also to the end of time. They were committed to the fathers, that by them, and by their children after them in succeeding ages, they might be transmitted to distant posterity. In the same way these oracles, and the additional oracles of the gospel-revelation are brought down to *our* days, and by us they are still to be communicated to those, who shall live in future days.

My design, from these words, is to shew the *excellence* of the Scriptures. And the *obligation* of *parents* to convey them to their *children*.

I. I shall shew the *excellence* of the scriptures.

The revelations given to the Jews are called *Lively Oracles*, because they proceeded not, like heathen oracles, from the pretended responses of senseless idols, or of departed spirits, under the artful management of designing impostors, but from the voice of the *living* and *true* God, communicated in a publick manner by the ministry of angels.

They may also be called *lively oracles*, because they instruct men in the way to *eternal life*, and foretel and describe that glorious Saviour, whom God has since sent to give life to the world.

As the scriptures of the Old Testament, so those of the New, are called by this name, because they are the means by which God communicates to us the knowledge of his will, and of the way of salvation. The excellence ascribed to the former, may be more eminently ascribed to the latter, in which God has spoken to us by his Son sent down from heaven, and by the Apostles of his Son, who spake by the spirit, which dwelt in him.

The scriptures come to us as a revelation from God, and their important contents demonstrate their author to be Divine. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness,

and able to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work."

If we consider the sacred volume merely as a *history*, it is the most complete, instructive and entertaining history, which can be found, or ever was written. There is none which, within so small a compass, contains so various and useful matter.

It narrates the origin of the world; the beginning of nations; the institution of government; the invention of arts; the settlement of various portions of the globe; the foundation of the church; God's dealings toward it in all ages of its existence; the rise and fall of empires, and the effects which these changes have had on the state of religion; the means used by providence for spreading the knowledge of the truth, and their various success; the preparation made for the coming of the Saviour; his character, works, doctrines, death and resurrection; the ministry of his Apostles, and the extensive spread of his doctrines under their ministry. And if to these accounts we add the *prophecies* of scripture, we have, in this book, a view of the world from its creation to its final dissolution.

If we were to read merely for the improvement of knowledge and the entertainment of the mind, no book could come in competition with this. But when we consider it as containing instructions relative to our conduct in life, and happiness in eternity, it rises in importance beyond all conception.

How grand, solemn, and interesting are its *doctrines!*

It directs our eyes to the earth, the heavens and the wonderful works around us, and bids us learn from thence, that there is one infinite, eternal, all-perfect Being, who created, sustains and fills the universe. It teaches us that this Being by his all-powerful word brought our world into existence, and in his wisdom peopled it with all its various in-

habitants, and in his bounty spread over it all the rich furniture which we behold—that he exercises a continual providence over the world, and all creatures in it, from men down to the sparrow—that he directs and governs all events, great and small, publick and private, designed and casual, and will conduct them to a glorious issue—that he created the first human pair in uprightness, and placed them in a delightful situation, but under a particular trial, in which their fidelity would intitle them to a happy immortality—that listening to the temptation of an apostate spirit, they violated the law of their trial, fell from their rectitude, and subjected themselves and their race to death—that sin thus entered into the world and has spread its malignant influence among the human race—that, though a Saviour was early promised, and new terms of happiness were proposed, yet men revolted more and more from God, till infidelity and vice had so generally overspread the earth, that God by an awful deluge swept off the whole race, except a single family, which was preserved to replenish the world anew—that after this, God from time to time gave particular revelations to holy men, and that by their example and instructions the knowledge of religion was continued—that God chose the nation of the Jews to be his peculiar people, instituted his worship among them, and gave them laws for the direction of their conduct, and promises of a Saviour, who should bring in a perfect dispensation, and accomplish the redemption of fallen men by his own death—that, in the time which his wisdom had appointed, the Divine Redeemer, who was to come, appeared in human nature, made a full revelation of God's will, and confirmed it by miracles, offered himself a sacrifice for human guilt, and after his death arose and ascended to heaven to be a constant intercessor for them who come to God in his

name—that through this Redeemer there is pardon for the chief of sinners in a way of repentance, grace to help the infirmities of humble souls, and eternal life for them who seek it by a patient continuance in well doing—that God has appointed a day, in which he will raise the dead, and judge the world in righteousness, and that this Mediator is ordained the Judge—that he will render to all according to their works, to the righteous eternal life, but to the ungodly everlasting destruction.

These are doctrines which we learn from God's lively oracles, and from them only—doctrines in which mankind are deeply concerned—doctrines which are adapted to restrain the progress of vice, and to promote the solid interests of virtue and happiness.

The oracles of God exhibit the most correct views of *human nature.*

They teach us, that as our bodies were by God's hand formed from the dust of the earth, so our souls were given by his immediate inspiration, and are distinct from, and superior to our bodies. They give us a humbling representation of man, as springing from dust and returning to dust again; but an exalted idea of him, as partaker of reason and intellect, and designed for glory and immortality. They shew us the happy condition, in which man was first made, the sad state into which he soon fell, and the wonderful way in which he may be recovered. They point out his various relations, the duties resulting from them, the end and design of his being, the happiness which in the divine goodness is prepared for him, and for which by divine grace he is now preparing. They inform us, that he is here in a state of probation, and that every thing which he does, will have some influence to render his future existence happy or miserable.

The scripture prescribes the most excellent *precepts* and *rules* of life.

As it gives us a perfect character of God, so it teaches us to study a conformity to this character in righteousness, goodness, sincerity and truth. It exhibits to us a complete pattern of piety and virtue in the life and actions of Jesus Christ, who once dwelt on earth and conversed with mortals. It inculcates our duties in all relations and conditions—the duties of love, reverence, faith, submission, gratitude and prayer, which we owe to God—the duties incumbent on us in our domestick and social connexions—the duties which belong to a state of prosperity and a state of adversity—the duties which respect our bodies and our souls, our passage through this world and our prospects in another. The religion which it describes is not merely external, but has its seat in the heart, and thence displays itself in the actions of the life.

It proposes the *purest motives* to virtue—motives taken, not from the interests and honours of the world, but from the character and government of God, from his approbation and favour, and from the promises of eternal felicity in a future invisible state.

It inculcates the *noblest virtues*, and these in the *sublimest exercises*; such as the forgiveness of injuries, love to enemies, benevolence to all men, contempt of the world, patience under sufferings and contentment in every condition.

It furnishes us with the *best defence* against *temptations*, and the *sweetest* consolation in *afflictions*, by directing our views to a holy, just, merciful and omniscient God; to a wise superintending providence, to the grace of the holy Spirit ready to be afforded for our assistance, and to an eternal state of felicity, reserved for those who are faithful to the death.

It has instituted the most excellent *means* of moral *improvement* in the order and discipline of the church, and in the stated ministrations of the sanctuary of God, to a faithful observance of which gracious promises are annexed.

Finally; The scriptures give us affecting illustrations of God's *attributes* and *providence* in his various dealings toward the children of men.

We there see many instances of his mercy to his obedient servants; many remarkable interpositions of his hand in favour of good men; many seasonable answers to the prayers of his afflicted saints; many tokens of his displeasure against impious and bold transgressors. By these dispensations the promises and threatenings of his word are verified, and encouragements are held up to the virtuous, and warnings to the ungodly.

In a word; Whatever we need to know, relative to our duty and happiness; to our comfortable passage through this world, and our safe entrance into a better, we may find in the sacred volume.

As God in his abundant goodness has committed his lively oracles to us, it is obvious,

II. That we are bound to convey them to succeeding generations.

God, in mercy to mankind, has given them a revelation, and established it by competent evidence. That which he has once given and confirmed, he commits to the care of those who receive it, that it may by them be conveyed to their children, and by these again to *their* children, and thus be handed down to distant ages.

Moses says to the people of Israel, "I have taught you statutes and judgments as the Lord commanded me. Keep and do them; for this is your wisdom in the sight of the nations, which shall hear of these statutes. Teach them to your sons and to your sons' sons." "These words which I com-

mand thee, shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them, when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them as a sign on thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes, and thou shalt write them on the doors of thine house and on thy gates."

The Psalmist, in later times, repeats these instructions. "Give ear, O my people, to my law, incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from our children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and the wonderful works, which he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children, that the generation to come might know them, even the children, who should be born, who should arise and declare them to *their* children, that they might set their hope in God, and not forget his works, but keep his commandments.

From God's *giving us* his holy oracles we may conclude their vast importance.

He would not have inspired men by his own Spirit, nor have sent down his divine Son from heaven to instruct men in the knowledge of his will, if this knowledge had been of little consequence, or if it could with facility and certainty have been obtained in any other way.

If the scriptures are important to us, they are so to our children; and if the conveyance of them depends on our care, we are under the most serious obligations to attend to this object.

The succession of the human race will doubtless be continued for many ages. The numbers that

will exist on the earth, after we are gone, exceed all conception. If their happiness depends on us, our charge in relation to them is solemn and awful, and our negligence and unfaithfulness will involve us in most tremendous guilt.

The *excellence* of the scriptures demonstrates our obligation to convey them to posterity.

We wish, that our children may grow up in such justness of sentiments and propriety of manners, as to be agreeable and useful in their day. And what can we do so conducive to this end, as to fill their minds with the noble sentiments, and form their manners by the holy precepts contained in these lively oracles? By these they may be led to just views of themselves and of mankind—of God and of a future life. By these they may be taught the temper and duty, which belong to all relations and conditions, and may learn how they ought to walk, that they may be accepted of God and approved of men.

These oracles, wherever they have their influence, purify the mind, restrain the passions, elevate the thoughts, smooth the language, polish the behaviour, and render men courteous, friendly and beneficent to one another in all their social intercourse and connexions. The things which are honest, just and pure, are lovely and of good report. Where there is any virtue, there will always be some praise. The young must cleanse their way by taking heed thereto according to God's word.

In the education of our children, we aim not merely at their subsistence, but also at their reputation; We think it not enough to teach them manual labour; we would also form them to a decent behaviour. The former they may learn, and yet be vexatious in society and odious to mankind. The latter they best learn from the pure precepts of scripture.

Whatever pains a parent may take to give *his* children an agreeable education, if he makes a knowledge of scripture no part of their education, he overlooks that which is most essential in the case. He may send them abroad to acquire a knowledge of the world and an easiness of behaviour; but if they go abroad without religious sentiments and principles, they are exposed to every snare and temptation, and their manners, instead of being refined and improved, will probably be more corrupted and depraved by conversing with the world. The unprincipled youth will always be ready to hear the instructions, which cause to err from the words of knowledge. And such instructions he will often find. There is a native depravity, which fondly listens to evil suggestions. This is corrected only by the influence of those pure sentiments, which are derived from revelation.

If we regard the *temporal*, much rather ought we to regard the *eternal* happiness of posterity. The former is *promoted* by the knowledge of the scriptures. The latter *essentially depends* on this.

Let us conceive, then, that there will be, for many ages, a succession of mortals on earth, who, after a short probation, will pass to another world, to exist eternally there. Let us conceive, that we now have in our hands a sacred book, which contains all the instructions necessary to prevent their misery and ensure their happiness in the eternal state before them. Let us conceive that their enjoyment of this inspired volume may probably depend on our care to commit it to our immediate successors, who will be under the same obligation to convey it to *theirs*. Under these impressions shall we not feel a sacred duty lying upon us to hand this book to those who stand next to us, that they may live by it, and may convey it still further on, and that thus it may reach to distant ages?

We are industrious in our callings to acquire property. We expect to leave it; but we hope our children will take and enjoy it after us. And will we not take some thought for their existence in another world, where their duration will be eternal, and their happiness may be perfect? If we convey to them our skill in business, and the utensils of our occupation, that they may acquire property, as we have done before them, ought we not much rather to train them up in a knowledge of, reverence for, and obedience to the holy scriptures, that they may acquire a meetness for felicity in the world to come?

If we believe the scriptures to be divine, we cannot doubt our obligation to obey them ourselves, and transmit them to our children.

It then deserves our enquiry, how this transmission shall be made.

Our care must be primarily directed to those, who are on the stage with us. Them who *shall* be born we must leave to the care of the generation, which shall immediately precede them. By a proper education of our next descendants we make the best provision in our power for remote posterity.

That we may convey God's oracles to our descendants, we must make a pious use of them ourselves. If we treat them with careless neglect, there is little hope that our children will receive them with reverence.

As it is incumbent on the head of a family to maintain the stated worship of God in his house, so it is proper, that, in connexion with this, he should daily read a portion of the sacred scriptures. When the young hear them read in this connexion, their minds will be more easily impressed with a reverence for them and with a sense of their importance.

It is of great use that the scriptures should be read in our schools.

The design of such institutions is, not only to instruct youth in the arts which relate to secular business, but also to instil into them pious sentiments and form them to virtuous manners. Care should always be taken, that the persons employed as instructors should be of a religious character, and of an exemplary conversation, and capable of inculcating pious sentiments, as well as of teaching the elements of science. And certainly a book, which contains the great principles and duties of religion, should be constantly used in those nurseries of knowledge and virtue. Other books may doubtless be introduced with advantage; but this should by no means be excluded. By the daily use of it in these little seminaries our children may not only learn to read it with propriety, but acquire a greater acquaintance with it and respect for it.

As there is no book so instructive, so there is none so entertaining. Many of its historical relations are adapted to enlarge the mind, interest the feelings and form the manners. There is in it such a variety of matter, that, in conversing with it, the youthful mind will not be sated.

Let us take great care that we never treat the scriptures, or any part of them disrespectfully in the hearing of our families, or of any others.

An unguarded word may make an unfavourable impression on tender minds. They who throw out in company, especially in the presence of the young, ludicrous cavils and captious objections against the scriptures, discover not only a corrupt heart, but a want of common decency. No man of tolerable breeding will wantonly ridicule that, which wise and good men revere. He who endeavours to corrupt the youth of other families, and to obliterate the sober sentiments, in which they have been educated, is guilty of an outrage on the family government of his neighbours, as well as of

gross impiety to God. He shows an enmity to mankind, as well as to truth; a hatred of goodness itself, as well as a disinclination to practise it.

We never should allow our children to read those books which treat religion with ridicule, as most books do, which are written against the scriptures.

Infidel writers do little in a way of candid reasoning. They depend chiefly, for the support of their guilty cause, on wit, banter and mockery. Thus they hope to corrupt the weak, and deceive the simple. Such books cannot be useful to any. They are dangerous to many. They are peculiarly dangerous to the young, whose minds are not sufficiently exercised to discern both good and evil. It is a wise caution of Solomon, "Cease, my son, to *hear* the instructions, which cause to err from the words of knowledge."

The scriptures teach and inculcate nothing which is evil—nothing but what is good in practice. Our children, by believing and obeying this book, will not become worse, but better members of the family and of society. And nothing but an implacable enmity to virtue can induce a man to corrupt the youth from the purity of its doctrines and precepts.

A man arrived to the age of discernment ought to examine the evidences on which the scriptures stand. But in order to judge of their truth and authority, he need not read every wicked book that he hears of, nor listen to every slander which is cast on the bible. The evidences of the gospel are clear and decisive; and when infidels resort to ridicule, they betray a consciousness, that the gospel will stand the test of reason.

If we would transmit the scriptures to posterity, we must maintain the religious order, which God has instituted.

The apostle says, "The church is the pillar and ground of the truth." It is by means of the regular

worship of God, the preaching of his word and the administration of his ordinances in the church, that the knowledge of the scriptures is from age to age preserved. If the church were to cease, and the public institutions of religion to be discontinued in any place, the scriptures, in that place, would fall into general oblivion. As we wish their continuance, we must honour all divine institutions by a faithful attendance. This is the advice of an inspired apostle, "Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering; consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is."

And, above all things, we must shew our belief of, and reverence for the scriptures, by that holy, and blameless life, which they require.

"Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." A conversation becoming the gospel is the best testimony in its favour.

Are you solicitous for the advancement of religion in the world? Would you rejoice to see your children more serious, your neighbours more virtuous, the youth in general more attentive to their spiritual concerns, the church more respectable for the number of its members, and the purity of their manners? Do you wish you had a better prospect for the rising generation and succeeding posterity? And do you enquire, what can be done? The apostle has given an answer. "Only let your conversation be, as it becometh the gospel of Christ."

Walk within your houses in a perfect way; thus you will recommend religion to your families. Be just, peaceable, grave and sober in your deportment among your neighbours; thus you will shew that religion is amiable in itself and profitable to men.

Attend in a regular manner on the institutions of God's house; thus you will invite the attendance of many, for they will be convinced, that God is among you of a truth. Cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God; thus you will contribute to the growth and purity of the church, of which you are members.

The means are plain and obvious; the success is hopeful with respect to others; with respect to yourselves it is sure and infallible.

Be steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; so your labour will not be in vain in the Lord.

SERMON XXVIII.

On the Perspicuity of the Scriptures.

2 CORINTHIANS iii. 12, 13.

We use great plainness of speech; and not as Moses, who put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished.

THE apostle speaks not of the writings of Moses in general, much less of all the ancient scriptures; for in many parts of them, as great plainness of speech is used, as in the New-Testament. Moses was an easy, familiar author. His history is written with an engaging simplicity; and his moral precepts are expressed with perspicuity and precision. The reference is only to that part of the Mosaic law, which typified the Saviour. Here only hung the vail; and here only lies the comparison in the text.

The appearance of the Son of God in human flesh—his sufferings for the sins of men—his resurrection from the dead, and the admission of Gentiles, as well as Jews, to a participation in the benefits of his mediation, were prefigured by various

ceremonies, as well as foretold in prophecy. Of these things such a knowledge, as was necessary to faith, hope and repentance, was attainable under the Mosaic dispensation; but a more distinct knowledge may be acquired under the gospel. An event in existence will be clearer than in prediction. An object in open view will be better understood, than it would be by description.

It is no reproach on the Mosaic writings, that the way of salvation could not be so perfectly learnt from them, as it may from the gospel; for this difference necessarily arises from the different circumstances of the time.

The Jews, indeed, formed very unworthy conceptions of the gospel dispensation. But their misapprehensions were principally owing, not to the obscurity of the Mosaic, or prophetic writings, but to the blindness and prejudice of their own minds. So the apostle observes, in the words following the text. "The children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished; but their minds were blinded: For unto this day remains the same vail untaken away, in the reading of the Old Testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless, when it, Isreal, shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away."

The apostle here declares, that the gospel is communicated with great plainness, in distinction from a figurative mystical manner of communication.

My design is to illustrate this point, and then to correct some misapprehensions, which many have entertained concerning it.

The gospel is a revelation from God. The great design of it is to bring salvation to fallen men, by teaching them the attainableness of it, the way in

which it was procured, and the terms on which it will be granted. For the same reason, that God would give us a revelation, he most certainly would give us one which may be understood. A greater affront can scarcely be offered to the wisdom and goodness of God, than to suppose the gospel is written with such designed obscurity and mysticism, in the things which immediately concern our duty and salvation, that it needs another revelation to explain it. The apostle, in our text and elsewhere, most expressly declares the contrary.—"We all," says he, "with open face, behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord." Divine things are so plainly laid before us in the gospel-revelation, that we may see them there, as a man sees his own face in a glass. "We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty—not walking in craftiness—not handling the word of God deceitfully; but, by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." It was his earnest desire and prayer, "that God would open to him a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, that he might make it manifest, as he ought to speak."—And it was his gratitude and joy, that as "the word of God had been made manifest by the preaching committed to him;" so, "the savor of the knowledge of God was manifested in every place, by the preaching of the apostles." A clear and perspicuous manner of communicating divine truths he esteemed to be of such indispensible necessity, that he made it a distinct subject of discourse in his first epistle to the Corinthians. He there inculcates on the public teachers in the church, that, as they were speaking to men, they were "not in the spirit to speak mysteries; but to utter with the tongue things easy to be understood,"—to speak in a manner adapted to the understanding of the hearers "for their edification and comfort",—

to manifest the truth so clearly to the conscience, that even "the unlearned and unbelievers may be judged and convinced, and so falling down may worship God." One, who only speaks mysteries in the spirit, he compares to a trumpet, which, giving an uncertain sound, warns none to prepare for battle. And he professes, that "he had rather speak five words in the church with his understanding, so as to teach others, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." As he did, so ought every preacher to "seek that he may excel to the edifying of the church."

In opposition to certain mystical teachers, who early crept into the christian church, the apostle John introduces his first epistle with a declaration, that he and the other apostles had always adapted their instructions to the common sense and understanding of mankind. "That which we have seen and heard, and which our hands have handled of the word of life, we declare unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us: For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and we shew unto you that eternal life, which was manifested to us. And these things we write to you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message, which we have heard, and declare to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness. And if we say, that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." And on account of that clear and distinct manner, in which the sacred oracles reveal divine and spiritual things, they are called a light, and compared, not only to a lamp, which guides a traveller's feet by night, but to the sun, which gives day to the hemisphere, and sheds light and heat on those who sit under his friendly beams. The heathens, destitute of revelation, are described as sitting in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death, and as seeking the nearest objects, not by

vision, but by feeling after them, if haply they may find them. "But God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness," has blest our eyes with "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ" and has "shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus," who is "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person."

It is not denied, that there are some things in the scriptures hard to be understood. Prophecies must, in their nature, be obscure, till they are elucidated by the event. Their general intention may be obvious, but the particular circumstances of the grand event foretold will remain unknown, till the event itself brings them to view.

Some of the doctrines of religion, as the distinction of Father, Son, and Spirit in one deity—the union of the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ—the resurrection of the dead, and the instant change of those who shall be found alive at the coming of Christ, are too deep to be fathomed by the line of human intellect. They are discovered as far as it is necessary for us to know them; and, perhaps, as far as language can discover them to such beings as we are. But still they remain incomprehensible to us, not through unnecessary obscurity in the manner of revelation, but by reason of the sublimity of the subjects, and our own imperfection.

There are many particular passages in revelation difficult to be explained; and after all our enquiries, still doubtful in their meaning; not because they are improperly expressed, but because certain customs and usages alluded to, are now unknown. It should, however, be always remembered, that no doctrine or duty of religion depends on a *single* passage, much less on a *doubtful* passage of scripture. Be the sense of the uncer-

tain text what it may, still the great articles of Christianity remain clearly stated, and firmly supported elsewhere. Only let us govern ourselves by that which is plain, and a few inexplicable texts will never endanger us.

In all things necessary to eternal salvation, the sacred writings are sufficiently intelligible and clear. What the Psalmist says of the divine law, may with equal truth be applied to the gospel. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple: The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."

The doctrines of the incarnation of the divine Saviour, and of his sufferings for the sins of fallen mortals; the doctrines of a universal resurrection, a righteous judgment, and an eternal retribution, are declared as strongly as language can express them, and revealed as clearly as the nature of the subjects will permit. The necessity and the nature of repentance toward God, and faith toward Jesus Christ; the duties and virtues of piety and devotion—of justice, charity, peace, and condescension—of humility, patience, temperance, and self-denial, are stated so plainly, repeated so often, inculcated in such a variety of phrases, and illustrated by such pertinent instances and examples, and most of them so familiarly exhibited in the life and character of the divine Redeemer, that no person of common understanding, while he reads with honest attention, can mistake them.

But then we must remember, that in searching the scriptures, we are not to take single detached passages by themselves, and shape them into a conformity to our own pre-concerted scheme. We are to consider the inspired writer's discourse in its natural coherence—observe the dependence of one part on another—compare spiritual things with

spiritual, and pursue the enquiry, not with a fixed determination to establish a favorite plan, but with an upright intention to discover the will of God. Thus we shall be led into all truth. If any man desire to do his will, he shall know of every doctrine proposed, whether it be divine, or whether it be the invention of men.

Now this being admitted, which is a certain and undeniable truth, that the sacred writers have used great plainness of speech, we may hence rectify several dangerous errors, which many have entertained concerning the scriptures.

1. Our subject exposes and confutes the very great mistake of those, who suppose that the scriptures in general, even in the historical, doctrinal and practical parts of them, are not to be understood *literally*, but contain some *secret*, *mystical* sense, distinct from the literal.

This notion is directly opposite to the express words of the apostle in our text. "We use great plainness of speech; and not as Moses, put a vail on his face. We all with open face behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord." If the apostles had concealed, under a vail, the sacred doctrines of religion; if they had hidden a spiritual, under a literal meaning; how could it be said, "they used great plainness of speech," in distinction from the ritual law, which represented, by types and figures, a Saviour to come? The contrast evidently shews, that the obvious, literal sense of the sacred writings is, in general, the true sense, and we are to look for no other. Figures and similitudes are often used by all good writers; not to conceal their meaning, but to exhibit truth in a more clear and striking light. Comparisons and parables frequently occur in the sacred writings; but the design and tendency of them is to illustrate spiritual things, and make them plainer to the apprehension; or to give them

an easier entrance into, and deeper impression on the heart. And they are either immediately explained, or else are in themselves so easy and obvious, that common sense cannot fail to understand and apply them.

To suppose that the scriptures are a mere enigma and allegory, not to be understood literally, but according to some curious, far-fetched interpretation, is to render them nugatory and useless. They can, on this supposition, be no rule of faith or practice; but every man's fancy must be his rule; and the best expositor of the Bible will not be the man, who has the soundest judgment, the purest heart, and the most improved understanding; but he who has the most teeming invention, and the wildest imagination. At this rate of interpreting it, we shall make it speak any thing and every thing, and consequently we can depend upon nothing.

In the times of the apostles, as we learn from some intimations in their writings, as well as from the writings of the Christian fathers, there were certain heretics, who went into the mystical way of treating religion. They denied Christ's real incarnation, death and resurrection, and the literal resurrection of the dead. They taught that Christ came not in the flesh, and that the resurrection was already past. They pretended that these things were only visionary and ideal. The apostle John plainly alludes to these heretics in his first epistle. "Beloved, believe not every spirit," or every man who boasts that he is guided by the spirit; "but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets," pretending to be under the direction of the spirit, "are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the spirit of God. Every spirit, who confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God; but every spirit, who confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God." Jude

doubtless alludes to the same persons, when he speaks of certain "dreamers who defile the flesh." They imagined that all religion consisted in the inward feelings and exercises of the mind, and belonged only to the spirit—that the flesh had no concern in the religion of man here, and would take no share in the happiness of man hereafter. Hence "they defiled the flesh;" took an unbounded licence to indulge the motions, and gratify the inclinations of the flesh. Read, with attention, those two epistles, and you will find persons of this description opposed and condemned.

But you will tell me, Paul himself often calls religion a mystery, and says, "Great is the mystery of godliness—we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery: the hidden wisdom."

But will you hence conclude, that the gospel is a hidden mysterious scheme of religion? Only read, in connexion, the passages alledged, and you will see that nothing could be farther from his intention.

There are, as we have observed, certain grand and astonishing doctrines in the gospel; incomprehensible indeed, but not unintelligible. You cannot, by searching, find out God; you cannot fathom the depth of his counsels; yet there is such a thing as the knowledge of God's character and will. We may know what is necessary to be known; but we cannot stretch our minds to grasp that which is, in its nature, incomprehensible to finite beings.

It is however, in a sense still different from this that the gospel scheme is called a mystery; as you will easily see, if you attend to the several places where this word is used.

The apostle says to the Ephesians, "To me is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery,

which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, that now might be known the manifold wisdom of God." This mystery, this manifold wisdom, these unsearchable riches, are things, which, from the beginning of the world, had been hidden in the purpose of God; but were by the preaching of the apostles, so clearly made known, that all men could see them. The dispensation of providence in the salvation of mankind by Jesus Christ, is called a mystery, with respect to that time when it was hidden in God's secret purpose; but not with respect to the time when it was declared and revealed, so that all men might see and know it.

In his epistle to the Romans, the apostle calls his preaching "a revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest;" and, "by the scriptures of the prophets is made known to all nations for the obedience of faith." The great work of redemption by Christ, and the calling of all nations to share in this redemption, was a mystery in former ages, being hidden in God's counsel, and not fully discovered even to Jews, much less to Gentiles. But since the coming of Christ, it is no longer a mystery. It is now manifested and revealed by the preaching of the apostles, as well as by the scriptures of the prophets, to all nations, as well as to the Jews.

What the principal doctrines are, which this glorious mystery comprises, and which are now made known for our faith and obedience, the apostle has shewn in his first epistle to Timothy. "Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached to the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

Again the apostle says, "I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." Can we suppose that the apostle shewed them something, which still remained a mystery after he had

shewed it. No, that would be a contradiction: *But* he shewed that which had been a mystery before; how those would be disposed of who were found alive at Christ's coming.

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, he tells them in what light they were to view the preachers of the gospel. "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." His meaning surely is not that they were to preach mystically; preach things which would remain mysteries after they had been preached; but that God had committed to them the dispensation of the doctrines of the gospel, which, as faithful stewards, they were to distribute by manifesting them to all men.

Further he says, "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory." But then he adds, "God hath revealed it to us by his spirit, that we might know the things that are freely given us of God, which things we speak." This mystery was that which had been hidden, but was now revealed and known to the apostles; and this they spake, that others also might know it as well as they.

I need not refer to other passages. It is sufficient to observe in general, that the word *mystery*, is commonly used in the same sense, throughout the New Testament, and especially in St. Paul's writings; not to signify something which is still unknown, but something which had been unknown, and was now made manifest. To *know* the *mystery* of the kingdom of God—*not to be ignorant* of the *mystery*—to *understand* all *mysteries*—to *see* what is the fellowship of the *mystery*—to *hold* the *mystery* of faith—to *acknowledge* and *make known* the *mystery* of the gospel, are phrases which so frequently occur, that no doubt can remain concerning the sense in which the word is used.

Our business then is to read and search the scriptures, and to attend on the dispensation of the gospel, in the way of God's appointment, that we may understand that great mystery of godliness, which was unknown to the early ages of the world, and is still unknown to many nations of the earth; but is revealed and manifested to us by the scriptures of the prophets, and more fully by the scriptures of the apostles, who used great plainness of speech. Let us contemplate with gratitude, and receive with joy the riches of divine grace. Let us give all diligence to secure a share in that great salvation, which was purshased by the Redeemer's blood, and is now in the distinguishing mercy of our God, clearly revealed, and freely offered to us.

2. Our text shews the great mistake of those who imagine, that the scriptures cannot be understood without some *special, immediate* discovery from the spirit of God.

To prevent misapprehensions, I would observe, we are no less dependent on the grace of God in the concerns of religion, than on his providence in the business of common life; and we need the kind direction and assistance of his spirit in searching the scriptures, as well as in the other ordinary duties of religion. But then the guidance of the spirit, in this matter, is in a way of aid to our natural faculties, not in a way of revelation. It is by "opening the understanding, fixing the attention, bringing to remembrance"—and removing prejudices against the truth; not by immediate discovery and communication. We are therefore, to "lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, to put on meekness and humbleness of mind," and to search the scriptures with careful attention, and not to expect that, without our enquiry, the truth contained in them will be immediately revealed.

If the scriptures are written plainly, why may we not, by the proper use of our faculties, understand

these, as well, as other plain writings? The only difference is in the aversion of a corrupt heart to divine and spiritual truths, and in the consequent inattention, forgetfulness, prejudice, and neglect of enquiry. Let this aversion be removed or suspended, and attentive enquiry take place, and there will be no more difficulty in understanding the holy writings, than common writings. All then that we can suppose the spirit of God to do in this case, is to awaken a sense of the importance of divine things, and open the heart to attend to them. When this is done, there will be such a proper use of our faculties, as will lead us to a competent knowledge of revealed truths, without an additional revelation.

The apostle, speaking of the great doctrines of the gospel, says, "God hath revealed them to us," the apostles, "by his spirit; for the spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God—which things we also speak;" and "we use great plainness of speech." But to what purpose have they so plainly spoken the things which were revealed to them by the spirit, if still we need to have them revealed to us by the spirit, as much as if they had never been spoken? If we cannot understand this written revelation, without another to explain it, how shall we understand the explanatory revelation without a third? We may as well be in doubt concerning the second, as the first; and, at this rate, there will be no end of revelations; and after all, we may not know, whether we understand any of them.

The apostle John says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God." But how shall we try them? He adds, "Hereby know we the spirit of God: Every spirit, who confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God." Every spirit, whose dictates correspond with the plain doctrines of the gospel, is

divine. "But every spirit, who confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God." Every suggestion which contradicts the divine oracles, is from the false spirit. The apostle, you see, makes the word of revelation the standard, by which you are to try and prove every spirit. But tell me how you will use this as a test and rule of trial, if you cannot understand it without an immediate discovery from the spirit? Are you to learn the meaning of the word from the spirit, and, at the same time, prove the truth of the spirit by the word? Must you not know your rule, before you can apply it to measure things unknown? Are you not to act as rationally in religion, as in the ordinary affairs of life? Whatever suggestion of your own minds; whatever doctrine of your most admired teachers, contradicts the revelation, which God has already given, conclude it to be false. Never suspect that the spirit of God contradicts itself.

The opinion in question, you see, must be false; and a little attention will convince you, that it is as fatal as it is false. It at once sets aside the use of the divine oracles, and leaves you without a guide. It lays you open and defenceless to every dangerous delusion. If once you conclude that the word of God can be understood only by immediate discovery, you will naturally take every impulse and suggestion, whether from satan or your own fancy, to be a heavenly dictate; and no rule will you have by which to examine it. You will drop all religious enquiry, and give yourself up to the fatal guidance of internal impressions, or of the instructions of those, whose daring pretensions lead you to imagine, that they are taught by the spirit of God. Thus you will become an easy prey to every wicked and subtile deceiver, and will soon fall into strong delusions to believe a lie. When you render your Bible useless by substituting something else in its place, you have

lost all your security. You are liable to be driven about with every wind of doctrine—by the sleight of men—by the impulse of imagination, and by the artifice of seducing spirits. In case of doubt, you will have nothing to which you can recur but your own feelings; and these will only strengthen the deception, and you will wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Fix then on this as a grand and leading principle, that the word of God is a sufficient rule of faith and practice, and that this is so plain, that with God's ordinary assistance, it may be understood by proper attention and examination. Adhere invariably to this rule, and immediately reject whatever you find inconsistent with it, or not capable of being supported by it.

3. Another error, similar to, and growing out of the former, which our text plainly confutes, is, that natural or unregenerate men are incapable of understanding the scriptures.

It will be necessary distinctly to state this point, that my meaning may not be misapprehended.

It is granted, in the first place, that men of corrupt and vicious hearts understand not divine truths in their excellence and importance; or, to speak more properly, they have not that sensible, realizing view of the certainty of them, and their own vast and immediate concern in them, which is necessary to give them a practical influence.—To use the apostle's expression, "They receive not the love of the truth." They receive it not as the word of God, and therefore it worketh not in them effectually, as it does in them who believe. But they may have a *rational, doctrinal* knowledge of the religion taught in the gospel. Their speculative opinions may be just and scriptural. They may have as good a stock of Christian knowledge in their heads, as many of the regenerate, though it does not in the same manner influence the heart.

It is farther granted, that a holy and upright heart is a great help in gaining a doctrinal knowledge of the scriptures. A carnal and vicious man is apt to neglect the means of knowledge, or to attend upon them in a negligent manner. His vices naturally prejudice him against the truth, and dispose him to overlook or pervert it. While the gospel condemns, and urges him to renounce his favorite sins, he is under a powerful temptation to relax its doctrines and precepts, that he may indulge his iniquities with less apprehension of danger.—But the honest and pure heart loves the truth, and readily embraces it, when it is fairly proposed with its evidence. So that, I say, the good man stands fairer to gain a right doctrinal knowledge of the scriptures, than any of a vicious heart.

There is, however such a thing as a natural man's having just sentiments of religion, and a good understanding of the great doctrines of the gospel. As in the renewed there are remaining corruptions, which may expose them to speculative errors in the less important things of religion; so some unsanctified men, by a certain natural openness of mind, accompanied with a good education, may be secured from gross and capital mistakes. And those corruptions and prejudices, which naturally oppose the truth, may, by the awakening influence of the divine spirit, be so far restrained and suspended, that conviction will enter, and truth gain their assent. If the scriptures are written with plainness, the same natural powers, which understand other things, may, with due application, understand these.

Saint Paul supposes, that a man, who has no charity, and who, in religion, is no more than a mere tinkling cymbal, may yet understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and speak on divine subjects with the tongue of an angel. Speaking of

himself and other apostles, he says, "By manifestation of the truth, we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." But how could they, in their preaching, manifest the truth and commend it to *every* man's conscience, if sinners understood not their meaning? He enjoins Timothy, "to instruct with meekness them who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledgement of the truth." But would Timothy's meek instructions convince of the truth those who could not understand him?

The apostle to the Hebrews speaks of some, "who, after they have been enlightened, and have tasted the good word of God, fall away, and are never renewed again to repentance." These doubtless are unregenerate men, for they fall away to destruction; but they were enlightened, and had tasted the good word of God. Certainly they had a doctrinal knowledge of it; yea, they felt some influence from it also.

The apostle Peter tells us of some, "who had escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and yet are again entangled therein and overcome." They had such a knowledge of the gospel as to be very observably influenced and reformed by it. They escaped the pollutions of the world. But they were still unrenewed. They are again, not only entangled, but overcome. And "their last state is worse than the first." It is added, "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they had known it, to turn from the holy commandment." They knew the way of righteousness, and yet turned from it. There are those, who know their Lord's will, and do it not, and who will, therefore, be beaten with many stripes.

Saint Paul, in his instructions to the prophets in Corinth, says, "If all prophesy," i. e. speak with perspicuity; "and there come in," into the assembly, "one who believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all, and so falling down he will worship God, and report, that God is in you of a truth." The unlearned and the unbeliever may understand, and be convinced by the doctrines of the gospel, when they are plainly proposed.

Farther, The apostles James and Peter expressly teach us, that "Christians have been begotten by the word of truth, and born of this incorruptible seed." But how can the word be a means of effecting this change, if it cannot be understood before the change is effected? "By the law is the knowledge of sin." But in order to its producing this knowledge, it must itself first be known. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." There may then, before faith, be a knowledge of the word of God.

"When Felix heard Paul reason of righteousness, and temperance, and a future judgment, he trembled." Did not he understand the preacher? How came he else to tremble?

When Peter, on the day of Pentecost, proved by plain arguments taken from the ancient scriptures, and by recent facts known to all, that Jesus, who had been crucified, was both Lord and Christ, his hearers felt the conviction: They were pricked in their heart.

But enough, and more than enough has been said, to shew, that the notion, which we are opposing, is directly contrary to the tenor of the gospel. A little attention will convince you, that it is also pregnant with most dangerous consequences.

Admitting it to be true, the conclusion is, there is nothing incumbent on sinners in order to their

conversion—it is vain for them to read the gospel, or hear it preached—there is no possibility of their gaining any religious knowledge before their conversion, and it is preposterous to seek any. Reason has nothing to do in matters of religion, and revelation, indeed, but very little: But men must wait for immediate dictates from on high.

Farther, if none but gracious persons understand the scriptures, then a right understanding of them is an evidence of grace. Well—every man who has formed any opinion at all, naturally concludes, that his own opinion is right; consequently he will conclude himself in a state of grace, because he knows the truth. And if we make this a test of grace in the heart, we shall condemn every man as a sinner, who thinks not precisely as we do. Our minds will be fast closed against farther light. We shall be obstinately tenacious of our own sentiments, right or wrong. If we fall into an error, we shall never part with it. Arguments from scripture will avail nothing to our conviction; for we are spiritual—we judge all things, and will be judged of no man.

But here it will probably be alledged; The apostle Paul himself, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, ii. chap. 14 verse, says, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned; but he that is spriritual judgeth all things."—From this passage some have inferred, that no unregenerate man can have a right understanding of the doctrines of the gospel. But this inference so palpably contradicts the plain texts already adduced, that it can by no means be admitted. Only attend to the scope and connexion of the apostle's discourse in this chapter, and his meaning will no longer be doubtful. He is speaking of the necessity of revelation, in order to our understanding the nature of the gospel-dispen-

sation, which was a mystery hidden from former ages, but was now made known to the apostles by the Spirit, and by them was plainly preached to mankind. In confirmation of the necessity of revelation, he says, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God."—The man, in a state of nature, he who has nothing to guide him but natural reason and human wisdom, "He receiveth not the things of the spirit;" the things revealed in the gospel by that spirit, which was communicated to the apostles; "For they are foolishness to him;" being destitute of that pomp and parade of human wisdom, by which the wise men of the world captivated their hearers; "neither can he know them," by any sagacity or study of his own, "because they are spiritually discerned;" they are above the discovery of human reason, and discovered only by revelation. He does not say, a natural man cannot know them when they are discovered; but he cannot know them before they are discovered by that revelation, which the spirit communicated to the apostles, and which they preached to others.

Yea, further, the doctrines of Jesus Christ seemed foolishness to many, because they were not taught according to the wisdom of the world, by deductions of human reason. The apostle says, "The Greeks seek after wisdom—we preach Christ crucified—to the Greeks foolishness, but to them who are saved—the wisdom of God." A man under the power of a carnal mind, and filled with a vain conceit of his own superior knowledge and goodness, discerns not in the gospel-scheme of salvation, that heavenly wisdom and excellence, which a humble, penitent soul perceives and admires. His speculative opinions of the gospel may be right; but the pride and corruption of his heart prevent him from receiving it with approbation and love. The unregenerate and the regenerate may both under-

stand the doctrines of the gospel alike—may quite agree in their speculative sentiments about them—may be equally sound and orthodox in their opinions; and yet they have a different relish and affection for these doctrines. The former, opposed to them in the temper of his heart, discerns no such excellence in them, as to yield to their power and influence. The latter loves, embraces and obeys them. The essential discriminating difference between them lies not in their knowledge of, and opinions about religion; but in their practical regard and affection to it.

4. Our subject teaches us the true method of preaching the gospel.

The preacher, after the example of the apostles, must use great plainness of speech, and by manifestation of the truth, commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God; lay before his hearers divine truths, with convincing perspicuity; reason with them out of the scriptures; and, from the principles of natural religion, open to them the doctrines and precepts of revelation by a judicious collection, and fair illustration of pertinent passages; and urge them home on the conscience by well-chosen arguments.

The method of some declaimers, to allegorize the plainest passages, and turn every literal text to a mystical sense, however it may amuse the ignorant and injudicious, and raise in their minds an admiration of the speaker's knowledge and grace, contributes nothing to improve the understanding, or to mend the heart. It is a criminal abuse and perversion of the divine word, adapted only to mislead the blind, and beguile unstable souls. Such preachers "turn away from the truth, and are turned unto fables."

5. You learn from the preceding observations, in what manner you ought to hear the word.

The gospel is written with a plainness suited to common understandings. Hear the preaching of it, not with implicit credulity, but with honest attention, judging for yourselves what is truth. What is agreeable to the sacred oracles, receive with readiness, and obey with cheerfulness. What appears doubtful bring to the testimony. What this condemns you must reject. Examine obscure texts by those which are plain; prove speculative opinions by practical precepts.

To conclude: It concerns you to be well settled in your religious principles, that you may not be carried about with every wind of doctrine. To this end search the scriptures diligently and humbly, applying, in your inquiries, all proper assistances. Revere the scriptures as a revelation from heaven, given to instruct you, what you ought to believe, to be, and to practise. Make these the standard by which to try every doctrine and every spirit. Bear in mind this thought, that religion is a rational thing, designed to make men wise, good and happy. Remember that it consists not in wild sallies of imagination, or vehement transports of passion; but in a calm, steady view of divine truths, influencing the temper and life; and whenever it takes possession of men's hearts, renders them like to God in holiness; gives them approving apprehensions of his character; directs them to a uniform love of him, hope in him and obedience to him; disposes them to justice, peace, candor and beneficence toward mankind; subdues their lusts and worldly affections; forms them to sobriety, meekness and purity; and makes them better men in all changes of condition, and in all relations of life. In short, consider, that religion is a solid, and an amiable thing; and they who possess it, are really excellent and substantially good.

Guided by these sentiments, you will easily distinguish between truth and error. Let the plain sense of scripture, not the suggestions of fancy, or the opinions of men, be your directory. Enquire with humility and integrity, with a desire to know, and resolution to do the will of God, fervently imploring the guidance of his good spirit. Thus will your inquiries be successful; for, "the meek he will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way."

SERMON XXIX.

The Soul rejoicing in deliverance from Prison.

PSALM cxlii. 7.

Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about, for thou hast dealt bountifully with me.

DAVID wrote this psalm in a time of great affliction. And his affliction was of such a nature, that he considered it as a kind of imprisonment. Perhaps he was hidden in the cave of Adullam, or Engeddi, whither he had retreated for security from Saul's pursuing army. Here he poured out his complaint before God. He saw no way of escape, no human means of deliverance.—He looked on the right hand, and there was none who would know him; no man cared for his soul. In this distress he thus cried to the Lord, "Thou art my refuge, my portion in the Land of the living; attend to my cry, for I am brought very low. Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name. The righteous shall compass me about." Thy mercy to me shall attract the admiration of all

good men, who will join with me in songs of thanksgiving.

We may here observe,

That there are some troubles, which much resemble an imprisonment, and in which humble souls apply to God for deliverance.

That one argument, which the humble plead for deliverance, is that God's name may be praised.

I. There are troubles in this world, which may be called an *imprisonment.*

The prisoner is in a state of confinement, secluded from friends, shut up in solitude, or in company which is worse than solitude, has no power to effect his own deliverance, and, in some cases, little hope of obtaining it.

There are other cases so much resembling this, that they may be called by the same name.

A state of *sickness* and *infirmity* is a species of imprisonment. The afflicted person is confined to his house, perhaps to his bed, and finds no rest even there. He is full of tossings. He says in the morning, When will it be evening? And in the evening, when will it be morning?

He loathes his necessary food; forgets to eat bread, or eats with disgust. He cannot go forth to pursue the occupations, mingle in the company, or participate in the pleasures of the world, or to view the beauties of nature and contemplate the bounties of providence.

He is in a measure, secluded from social converse; he may through weakness be incapable of it, or through long confinement have become as a dead man out of sight, and out of mind. Hence James recommends it, as an essential Christian duty, that we visit those who are in affliction. It is a high encomium, which Christ bestows on his faithful friends: "I was sick and ye visited me, I was in prison and ye came unto me."

It is to pious souls a great aggravation of this affliction, that they are deprived of the privilege of social worship: They once rejoiced with them who said, "Come, and let us go up to the house of God: Great pleasure and improvement they have often found in the sanctuary. Often have their souls been comforted and enlivened by attending on divine ordinances. When they remember these things, they pour out their souls within them; for they had gone with the multitude; they went with them to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise. "This thing they desire of the Lord; this they seek after, that they may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of their life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple."

Some, in their sickness, may reflect, with painful regret, on their past criminal neglect of the sacred privileges of the sanctuary. Solomon speaks of those, who mourn at the last, when their flesh and their body are consumed, and say, "How have we hated instruction, and our heart despised reproof?"

Another painful circumstance, which often attends a state of sickness, is a fear of its consequences. There are many who through fear of death are subject to bondage. This bondage to fear increases as death seems to approach. Sickness gives them a more sensible apprehension of the nearness, certainty and solemnity of death, than they have usually felt in former days. They now lament their past neglect of selfexamination, and their past inattention to the state of their souls. They now long for those hopes and comforts, which spring from a consciousness of godly sincerity. They think, they could bear the pains of sickness with patience, and meet the change of death with serenity, if they could assure their hearts before God. In this state of mind they pray, "O God,

bring our souls out of prison, that we may live and praise thy name." Deliver us, that we may repair past neglects, resume past privileges, and acquire consoling hopes—My friends, in the day of health lay a foundation for comfortable hopes and reflections in sickness.

Again; *Old age* is a kind of imprisonment. It is attended with all the painful circumstances of sickness, and with this additional one, that there is no hope of being liberated from this prison, till death brings a discharge. Happy the aged saint, who can contemplate this discharge, as his final deliverance from bondage, and his introduction to the glorious liberty of the sons of God. When he sees his prison walls giving way, and feels them tottering around him, he looks through the opening crevices with pleasure, and beholds with transport the heavenly light which darts through them. He lifts up his head with joy, for his redemption draws near. He anticipates with gladness the approaching hour, when he shall leap from his prison; shall escape from the sinful company, in which he has long been detained, and shall find himself compassed about with the righteous, with angels and the spirits of the just, who will join with him in songs of praise, that the Lord hath dealt bountifully with him.

But how gloomy and dismal is the period of declining life, to the conscious sinner, who has lived a stranger to God and religion, and is now a stranger to peace and hope? His soul is in prison—in painful confinement and dreary darkness. And yet here he wishes to remain. He dreads the day, when his soul shall be brought out of prison; for this deliverance will be only for consignment to a more doleful dungeon, from which there is no escape, and no redemption.

How wise are they, who in early life, prepare for old age—who by a seasonable attention to piety and religion provide for themselves the comforts of a good conscience and a good hope against that evil day, when all worldly prospects shall be cut off, and earthly pleasures flown away. To this early preparation wisdom urges you, ye youths: Obey her, and she will preserve you.

Solomon, speaking of the evils incident to age, says, "Those that look out of the windows are darkened, and the daughters of musick are brought low." The failure of *sight* and *hearing* is a calamity to the aged; a much greater calamity to the young. The former have enjoyed these faculties for many years, and expect not to need them much longer. The latter hope for future years; but gloomy is the thought, that those years are to pass in prison—in solitude and darkness—in a useless or unsocial confinement. The person deprived of *hearing* is alone in the midst of company. He tastes none of the pleasures, and enjoys none of the benefits of friendly conversation, and he is excluded from the sacred privileges of the sanctuary, which were once his delight.

Blindness is a calamity still more grievous. It places the sufferer, not merely in a prison, but in a dungeon. He can no more view the beauties of nature and the wonders of creation. He can no more behold those stupendous works, which display the majesty, wisdom and goodness of God. To him the sun and moon and stars, which show the Creator's glory, are extinguished. The distinction of day and night is lost. The book of nature is a universal blank. The book of revelation is shut and sealed. He can no more refresh his weary spirits, revive his pious sentiments, improve his religious knowledge, enliven his devout affections, and strengthen his holy resolutions, by retir-

ing to his closet and there looking over the sacred pages. Happy is he, if he has a fund of knowledge treasured up in his mind, from which he can draw occasional supplies. Happy, if he has friends about him, who by reading and conversation can supply in some measure the want of sight.

He also feels his loss in the common duties of life, and in his important domestick cares. He is shut up and cannot go forth. While he is in his house, he gropes for the wall at noon day. When he ventures abroad, fear is in the way. He calls for a guide to direct his steps. He may apply the complaint of the prophet; "I have seen affliction by the rod of God's wrath. He hath led me and brought me into darkness, and not into light. His hand is turned against me all the day. He hath set me in dark places, as those who are dead of old. He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out. He hath made my chain heavy. When I look for light he turns it into darkness and the shadow of death." In such a case he needs the comforts of faith and patience; and is intitled to the compassion and prayers of his friends.

When we see one in this uncomfortable condition, Let us thank God for our own happy distinction. And remembering, that the seeing eye and the hearing ear are from him, and may, at his pleasure be withdrawn from us, as they have been from others, let us, while we enjoy them, wisely improve them in acquiring those supplies of knowledge and grace, which will be our consolation and support in the dark and solitary seasons of life.

The light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon us by the gospel revelation. Wo to them who love darkness rather than light, and, shutting their eyes, walk in darkness while the light shines around them. "Will God shine into our hearts, and give the light of the knowledge of

the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Will he enlighten the eyes of our understanding, that we may see what is the hope to which we are called, and what are the riches of the glory of that inheritance which God has provided for the saints.

There is still another and more important sense, to which the expression in the text may be accommodated. We may consider it as descriptive of the moral condition of a guilty soul.

The scriptures represent sinners as in a state of bondage, as under the dominion of sin, in the bond of iniquity, bound over to judgment, shut up unto the faith, and having no way of escape, but by the redemption which is in Christ.

The sinner, awakened to a just and impressive view of his condition, sees his soul to be in prison. Convinced of his corruptions and transgressions, and of the strict demands and dreadful sanctions of God's law, he knows, that he is worthy of, and obnoxious to eternal condemnation. He once thought himself alive, and felt secure. He had no conception what sin was, how it abounded in him, and how God's threatenings were pointed against him. His conscience was quiet and undisturbed; or if it happened at any time to be awakened, it soon sunk down into its former apathy. His thoughts were chiefly employed about the interests and pleasures of the world. These he pursued with as much ardor, as if he had nothing else to regard, no sins to forsake, dangers to escape, or soul to save. But when the commandment comes home to his conscience in its purity and extent, in its righteous demands and awful threatenings, he perceives himself to be dead. Sin now by the commandment becomes exceedingly sinful, and his soul exceedingly guilty. With his former partial and contracted ideas of the law, he discerned in himself but few transgressions,

and these small and excusable. But now, by the powerful application of the law, his transgressions appear innumerable and highly criminal. He perceives in himself those evil imaginations, corrupt affections and impious enmities, of which once he had no suspicion.

He has now different sentiments of the nature and malignity of sin. He cannot palliate and excuse it, as he used to do. He views the commandment as coming from divine authority, and as binding himself no less than others; and as he knows it to be just and good, so he feels his obligation and desert. He beholds the lightenings and hears the thunders of Sinai, sees them to be pointed at him, and finds himself defenceless.

Some latent principles of sin are now put in operation. In his careless, unawakened state, he gave free indulgence to his lusts. Now they are laid under great restraint. Hence he feels that contrariety of heart to the nature and law of God, of which he was before quite insensible. While conscience was asleep, corrupt inclinations met with no controul, and scarcely was their existence perceived. But now there is a conflict between his conscience and his lusts, and the latter become manifest.

He is pressed with new temptations. To divert his serious meditations and resolutions the adversary throws in his way those objections to piety and enticements to iniquity, for which, in his insensible state, there was no place or occasion. He feels those workings of pride, unbelief, impatience and discouragement, and those oppositions to inward, experimental religion, to which he once seemed a stranger. Hence he is ready to conclude, that he is grown worse, and is become more wicked than ever he was. But the real difference may

be, not in the corruption of the heart, but in his sense of this corruption.

He now sees, that the law of God condemns him to death, and his conscience justifies the sentence. He is not reconciled to the sentence as what he is *willing* should be executed; but he approves it, as what might *justly* be executed. He adopts the language of David, "Thou mayst be justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest."

Thus he finds his soul in prison, in the bond of iniquity, under the condemnation of the law. And he feels an incapacity to effect his own deliverance. He cannot wrest himself out of the hands of justice, expiate his guilt, repair the dishonors he has done to God, or compensate the injuries he has done to men. He cannot revoke the mischiefs produced by his evil conversation and example. He knows not how many by his influence have been led astray, nor where to find them, that he may counterwork this influence. Some of them may be in another world, and most of them beyond his reach. If he could see them, perhaps he could do them little service. The infection communicated to them may have wrought too deeply into their souls to be cured by his applications. If he could revoke the mischiefs he has done, and do no more, yet past guilt remains, which no human works can cancel, and which sovereign mercy alone can remove.

But he feels himself incompetent to the obedience which he owes, and to his recovery from the bondage into which he has fallen. Thus he is shut up unto the faith which the gospel reveals. He cannot, he dares not trust in himself, rely on any works he has done, any resolutions he forms, any exertions he shall make, as adequate means of deliverance. He prays in the language of the humble Psalmist, "Thou art my refuge, O Lord, my portion in the land of the living; attend to my cry, for I am

brought very low; deliver me from mine enemies; bring my soul out of prison."

Here he must look to the Saviour by faith. "It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ came into the world to save sinners." Let the sinner, convinced of his guilty and helpless state, look away from himself to the merciful God through the Redeemer, who came to save them who are lost. Let him count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, and renounce all other ways of salvation, that he may win him and be found in him.

God, who sent his Son into the world to redeem a guilty race, will mercifully hear the prayers, and abundantly pardon the sins of the humble and penitent. The Saviour, who condescended to die for sinners, will kindly embrace those who come to him sensible of their guilt. The spirit whom the Father has sent in Christ's name, is able to cleanse mourning souls from the defilement of sin, and to preserve them unto eternal life.

The sincere penitent, in the belief of these truths, resigns himself to the God whom he has offended, relying on his mercy through the atonement of Jesus for the pardon of all his sins, and resolving through the grace of the spirit to walk in newness of life. Thus being made free from sin, from its reigning power and condemning guilt, he has his fruit unto holiness. He reckons himself to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ.

II. We proceed to the second part of our subject: That one great argument which humble souls urge for their deliverance from prison is, that God's name may be praised.

This argument they use both in worldly afflictions, and in spiritual distresses.

They regard the glory of God in all conditions. In the day of trouble they aim to glorify him by

patience and submission, which are graces appropriate to a state of adversity. But they desire deliverance from such a state, that they may glorify him more; may serve him in the active duties of piety; and, enlivened by his mercies, may more sensibly feel their obligations, and more devoutly speak his praises; and especially that they may mingle with the saints in celebrating his works in the sanctuary. This was David's spirit and language in his afflictions. "Thou art the God of my strength. Why dost thou cast me off? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? O send out thy light and truth, let them lead me, let them bring me to thy holy hill, and to they tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy; yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God, my God." "Have mercy upon me, O God, and consider my trouble, that I may shew forth all thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion, I will rejoice in thy salvation." This he considered as one end which God intended in the deliverances, which he was pleased to grant. "Thou has turned for me my mourning into dancing, thou hast put off my sackcloth and girded me with gladness, to the end that my glory may sing praise unto thee and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever?" As patience and submission mitigate the smart of affliction; so gratitude and praise exalt the sweetness of salvation.

Again; humble souls mourning under a sense of their *spiritual* imprisonment, pray for deliverance with the same argument in their lips, and the same sentiment in their hearts.

To the Ephesians the apostle observes, that God had predestinated them to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, and had granted them a title to an inheritance among the saints, that they should be to the praise of his glory." Saint Peter instructs

believers, that one reason why God had selected them from the world, as a holy nation and peculiar people, was that they might shew forth the praises of him, who had called them out of darkness into his marvellous light."

Penitent souls, burdened with a sense of sin and guilt, are afflicted with a view of their own danger; and from this they seek deliverance. But what adds to their grief and anguish, is a conviction of the dishonour which they have offered to God by breaking his commandments and abusing his mercies. Hence the sorrow which works repentance is called *godly* sorrow, as the sincerity of Gospel obedience is called *godly* sincerity. While they mourn for their sins, as committed against God, they will pray for deliverance, that they may glorify his name. In the sorrows and humiliations of conscious guilt, they think, how happy are the souls, whose iniquities are pardoned, and whose pollutions are purged away—who can look up to God as a reconciled friend, and draw near to him with confidence of his gracious attention—who can appropriate the rich promises of his word and view all things as working for their good—who can contemplate heaven as their eternal home, and death as their passage thither. They long to be placed in this happy condition, that they may partake in the joys, and join in the praise of them who are redeemed from the earth. This was the prayer, and this the resolution of David in the penitential exercises of his soul. "Blot out all mine iniquities, and create in me a clean heart; take not thy holy spirit from me, restore to me the joy of thy salvation; deliver me from blood guiltiness, and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. Open my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth all they praise."

If any feel themselves in prison, and desire to be

brought out of it, that they may priase God's name, let them remember and consider that the door of deliverance is open. The Redeemer is come, is come to Zion, is come to this place. He was sent to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. By the blood of the covenant he sends forth the prisoners out of the pit. Turn ye then to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope. Even *to day* does he declare, that he will render to you double to all your prayers, and to all your hopes.

Do you pray to be brought out of prison, that you may praise God's name? His Son is here to bring you out. Give him your hand. Go forth with joy and thanksgiving, leaning on the beloved. Praise him by a thankful acceptance of his great salvation, and a cheerful compliance with the gracious terms of it. Come now, renounce every sin, devote your lives to his service, and hope in his grace. If when he offers you his salvation, you will not receive it—if when he holds out to you a pardon, you will retain your iniquities—if when he has once suffered for your sins, you open his wounds afresh by your impenitence—if when his spirit draws you, you pull away the shoulder and refuse to turn—if when patience waits, you harden your hearts; is this to come out of prison, that you may praise his name? No: it is to embrace your chains, contradict your prayers and insult the Saviour.

If any of you enjoy the persuasion, that your souls have been brought out of prison, walk at liberty, and be no more entangled with the corruptions of the world. Thank God for your deliverance, and honour him by a holy life. You then honour God's grace, when under its influence you live as becomes the gospel. Let the love of Christ constrain you, for he died for you, that henceforth you should live to him; not to yourselves.

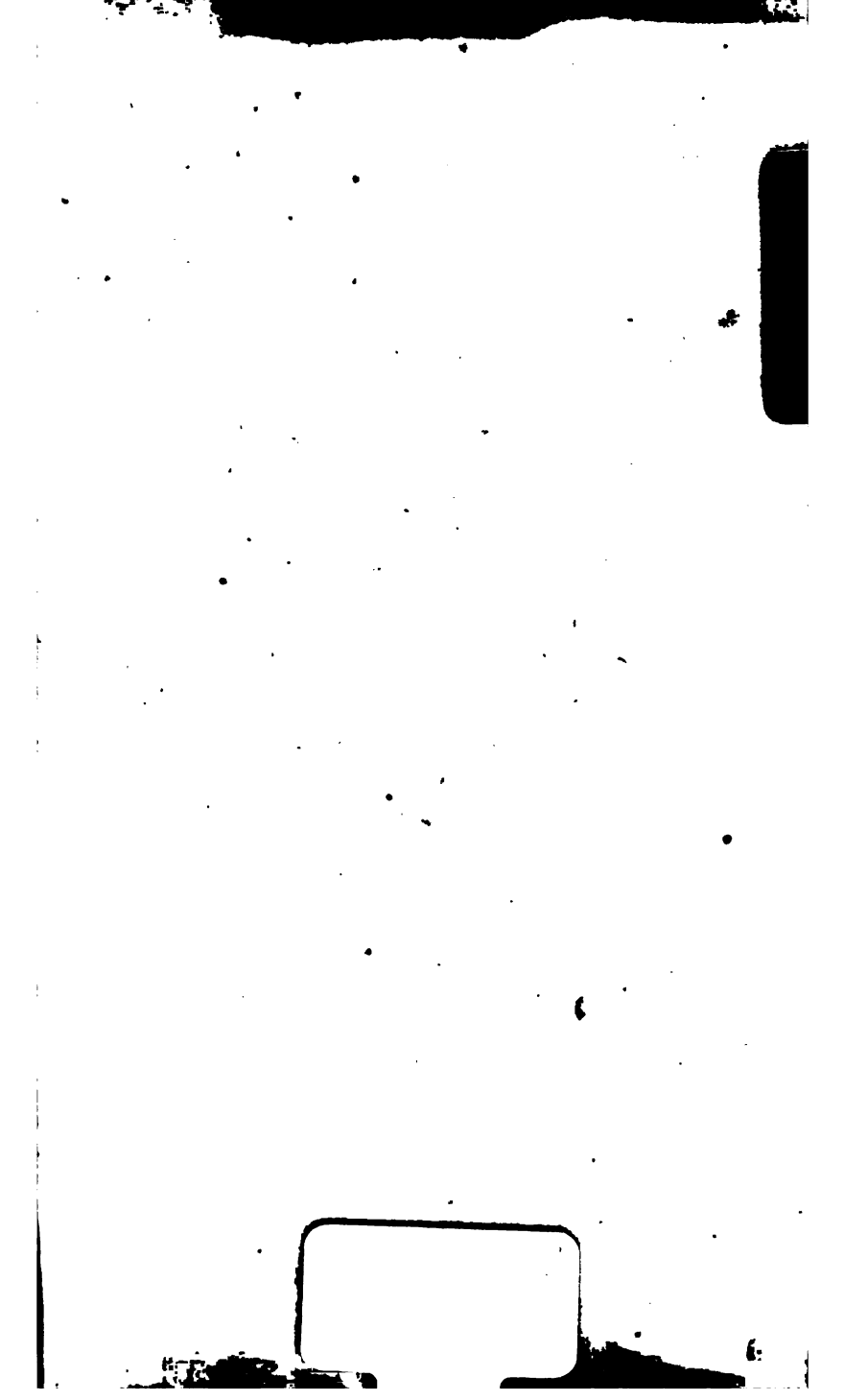
He has delivered you from the bondage of sin, that henceforth you should not serve sin, but serve him in newness of spirit.

Give praise to God for your deliverance, by inviting others to accept his salvation. "God hath quickened us," says the apostle," that he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness to us by Jesus Christ." "And for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me Jesus Christ might shew forth all long suffering for a pattern to them who should afterward believe in him to everlasting life." David prays, "Restore to me the joy of thy salvation; then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

If while you profess to be the subjects of God's grace, you by unholy lives strengthen transgressors and lay stumbling blocks before the weak, you disdishonor the holy name, which you ought to exalt, and cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of among its enemies.

Believers, who have been set at liberty from their prison, should thus glorify God's grace in this world. But in the world to come, they will display its glory in a more perfect manner.

The grace of God in bringing them out of prison, will in heaven be the burden of their song. *This* they will sing in the most exalted strains. The wonders of creation and providence will often be made the delightful subjects of their praise. But when the glory of divine grace in the salvation of sinners, and especially in their own salvation, becomes the theme, O, what raptures will they feel? They will set their harps on the highest key, and strike the liveliest chords; and yet their praise will sink under the majesty of the theme. When they begin this new song, *Thou art worthy, for thou hast redeemed us by thy blood;* saints and angels all around will catch the sound, and spread it wide as

creation. Every creature in heaven, and those redeemed from the earth, will feel the subject and re-echo the song.

What remains, but that we joyfully accept the overtures of God's mercy. Live no longer in prison, but come forth into the liberty, with which Christ offers to make you free. Are you sensible of your bondage and desirous of liberty, hear the Redeemer's call; "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."